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# Christ, Our Hope

DR. ROBERT O. FIFE

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## CHRIST OUR HOPE

I Timothy 1:1

### Introduction

It is significant that these lectures which memorialize a faithful servant of God should be the occasion for reaffirmation of the Christian hope. So it has always been with our faith, which teaches us to draw encouragement from the "cloud of witnesses" who have contributed to our heritage. Beholding in the past the goodness of God, faith is transformed into hope when it confidently affirms that "to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose." <sup>1</sup>

Man has been called a "time-binder". Through the gift of language he shares the memory of the race, and understands the present in the light of that memory. But man is also conscious of the "comingness" of the future. Because the past lives within the present man is vitally involved in history. Because the future ever becomes present man is vitally involved in prophecy.

The sense that the future bodes ill leads man to experience despair in the present. The sense that the future promises good leads man to experience hope in the present. Hope and despair are the results of man's existential involvement in time. He can avoid this involvement only at the peril of his manhood.

Faith, hope and love are intertwined as the trinity of life. Each bears with the others an indissoluble relationship. Hope is faith's response to the stream of life. Hope is faith's confidence in the creativity of love. As Emil Brunner has said,

The New Testament declares that in faith we already have a real participation in what is future, in what is coming. But the consummation of what is coming is yet unrealized. For this reason faith of necessity becomes hope. <sup>2</sup>

The hope of which we speak is not wishful thinking or random optimism in which one seeks to escape the anxiety of life by unrealistic detachment. Christian hope is that confidence in Christ whose revelation in history makes Him the Eternal Contemporary and Lord of the Future. Christian hope is faith's courage to become redemptively involved in an unredeemed world. Not content with a "courage to be", it dares to accept the "power to become." <sup>3</sup>

For this reason, the unique quality of Christian hope is that it is essentially personal. It is grounded, sustained, and fulfilled in one's personal relationship to Jesus of Nazareth, whom we confess to be the Messiah and Son of God.

Thus we shall speak of "Christ Jesus our Hope" under the titles, "The Ground

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1. Romans 8:28

2. Emil Brunner, Divine Human Encounter, 163

3. John 1:12



of Hope," "The Life of Hope," "The Community of Hope," and "The Fulfillment of Hope."

## THE GROUND OF HOPE

Christian hope is faith's response to God's self-disclosure recorded in scripture. Therein God makes Himself known as the great I AM who is both holy and faithful. He is Alpha and Omega. "Of him, and through him, and unto him, are all things."<sup>1</sup> Having created man in His own image God reveals Himself as a God of covenant who invites His creatures to share in His eternal purpose.

The cosmic significance of that invitation, and of mankind's primeval rejection of it, must not be lost upon us. This unspeakable tragedy affeted the whole creation, which in the divine wisdom was "subjected to vanity" until human redemption be accomplished. Only when man recognizes that from which they are lost can they account for the sense of despair. Meaningless despair is the ultimate negation, for it professes to be deprived of that (hope) which it considers non-existent.

Therefore the scriptures interpret the meaning of our despair in order that we might have hope. It is affirmed that because of sin "the whole creation was subjected to vanity." This is the occasion of our despair. But the scriptures hasten to add that even this was done "in hope." Vanity or emptiness is not the ultimate, for God is above the creation which He subjected to vanity. The same God has promised that the whole creation will once again obtain "the glorious liberty of the children of God."<sup>2</sup>

So the scriptures testify to the involvement of God both in our despair and in our hope. To many Greeks such an involvement was impossible. The gods could not by their very nature be concerned for men. It was commonly believed that such concern would deprive them of their beatitude. As Aristotle said, "Our conception of the Gods is that they are preeminently happy and fortunate."<sup>3</sup>

Not so Jehovah, the God of Israel. From the very beginning of the Biblical witness God is revealed as intensely concerned for mankind. So anguished is He at man's estrangement that He even "repents" of having created man.

This concern is manifested in numerous ways from the dawn of history, but achieves a special focus in the call of Abraham. The word of God is significant to the patriarch:

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1. Romans 11:36

2. Romans 8:20,21

3. Nichomachean Ethics, 1178



Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and be thou a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and him that curseth thee will I curse: and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 1

Here was a clear call to share the concern of God. It was a call to commitment based not upon proff but upon promise. The integrity of God was offered as the basis of covenant. God would show Abraham the land after he commenced the pilgrimage. Thus the faith of the patriarch gave birth to hope as he committed himself to the faithfulness of God.

The call to Abraham was unique in that God not only promised the patriarch that he would be blessed, but that he would be a blessing. The hope which is unique to the Bible, and which alone satisfies the human heart, is not one surrounded by ironclad guarantees, but one which is discovered through becoming an instrument of another's hope. It is no accident that many people in a self-centered age find life destitute of hope.

It is not our present purpose to trace in detail the unfolding of Israel's hope from Abraham through the Davidic Kingdom to the prophets. Suffice it to say that in each age those who laid claim to the hope found it yet beyond immediate realization.

Moses could but view the Promised Land from afar. Samuel beheld with deep disappointment the popular clamor for an earthly king. The latter years of the Davidic Kingdom were overshadowed by the revolt of Absalom. The glory of the highly favored Solomon degenerated into crass materialism and avarice. Oppression led to civil war, exile, and bondage. The words of the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," echoed throughout the land.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah could but voice the despair of the more sensitive when he cried, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved...Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there?"<sup>3</sup>

Amidst the disillusionment of succeeding generations the prophets affirmed with one voice that Israel's true hope was not geopolitical but spiritual. Those who placed their trust in the works of their own hands, or in the chariots of Egypt, were warned that their confidence was vain. The true hope declared by the prophets remained firm during the collapse of the northern and southern kingdoms, for it rested not in the weakness of men but in the faithfulness of God.

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1. Genesis 12:1-3

2. Ecclesiastes 1:2

3. Jeremiah 8:20,22



The repeated blasting of hopes based upon the achievements of men had a two-fold consequence within Israel.

In the first place, the long sequence of human failure provided a backdrop of despair against which the figure of Messiah stood out more boldly. He would arise as a root out of the dry and sterile ground of human failure.<sup>1</sup> He would appear as a "great light" shining upon the people who walked in darkness. Because He would be identified with Israel, His sovereignty would become their hope. So spoke Isaiah:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.<sup>2</sup>

But divine sovereignty alone did not constitute Israel's true hope. Such sovereignty in the midst of human sin meant judgement. To the unrepentant, said Amos, the Day of the Lord is "darkness, and not light."<sup>3</sup>

Again, however, the promise of Messiah spoke with relevance, for He would come not only as anointed Sovereign but as Suffering Servant. Messiah would be "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." His identification with Israel would not only be regnant but redemptive. In historical prospect Isaiah said,

He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed...Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.<sup>4</sup>

In the second place, the failure of Israel's socio-political aspirations served to divide society into those who surrendered to bitterness and despair, and those who embraced the promise of Messiah. The latter constituted the "remnant"--the true children of Abraham, who "in hope believed against hope."<sup>5</sup>

The remnant saw in the judgment of history the judgment of God. But they also believed that God who judged in history would also redeem in history. Therefore they held to hope within the very social dissolution which led others to despair. Of them Isaiah said,

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and they that are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again lean upon him that smote them, but shall lean upon Jehovah, the Holy one of Israel, in truth. A remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Isaiah 53:2

2. 9:6,7

3. Amos 5:18

4. Isaiah 53:5,6

5. Romans 4:18

6. Isaiah 10:20,21



But even the remnant found the hope proceeding before it yet unfulfilled. The Hebrew Letter's description of the ancient heroes of faith applies as well to all the remnant:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.<sup>1</sup>

The scrolls from the community at Qumran testify to the tremendous messianic fervor which characterized Israel in the era immediately preceding the birth of Christ. The prophecy of Daniel regarding the End of Days was commonly interpreted as pointing to the close of the first century B.C.<sup>2</sup>

So remained the remnant in Israel until Messiah came--a remnant perhaps best represented in the venerable Simeon and Anna. To them hope was fulfilled only to give birth to further hope. So Simeon could say when he beheld the infant Jesus,

Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord,  
According to thy word, in peace;  
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,  
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples;  
A light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of thy people Israel.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, like the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night, the Messianic hope led the remnant to Messiah. But neither remnant nor hope ceased with the Advent. Rather, each took on new dimension and meaning, grounded in new acts of God in Christ.

The cross of Christ, and His resurrection, made possible "better promises" confirmed in a "better covenant." In the gift of the Church the remnant assumed a new and more universal form. This new Israel was not Abraham's seed according to flesh, but according to faith.

The apostolic Church was very conscious of having entered into the hope of Israel. Such was the burden of Peter's message on Pentecost, which concluded with the affirmation, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified."<sup>4</sup> Again, on Solomon's Porch, Peter declared,

The things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent ye therefor, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he

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1. Hebrews 11:13

2. See Hugh J. Schonfield, Secrets of the Dead Sea Scrolls, 40f.  
Daniel 9:24f

3. Luke 2:29-32

4. Acts 2:36



may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old. <sup>1</sup>

Paul did not hesitate to identify the Christian hope with that of Israel when, in his defense before Agrippa, he said,

I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king! Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead? <sup>2</sup>

Again, when Paul addressed the Jewish leaders in Rome he said, "For this cause therefore did I entreat you to see and to speak with me; for because of the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain." <sup>3</sup>

So the Church entered into the hope of Israel. Jesus Himself had said, "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." <sup>4</sup> This prospect was the "mystery" declared by Paul, when he said, "The Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel." <sup>5</sup>

But if the Church entered into the hope of Israel, Israel found her hope fulfilled in the Church. Speaking again of the ancient heroes, the writer of the Hebrew Letter says,

And these all, having had witness borne to them through their faith, received not the promise, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. <sup>6</sup>

Through Messiah's accomplished work there would be "one fold", and "one Shepherd," and one communion of saints.

It is significant that great affirmation of Christian hope recorded in scripture, like the psalms of Israel, often take the form of doxologies. Such is that found in the First Epistle of Peter, which says,

Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by

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1. Acts 3:18-21

2. Acts 26:6-8

3. Acts 28:20

4. Matthew 8:11

5. Ephesians 3:6

6. Hebrews 11:39,40



the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>1</sup>

Or hear the words of Paul, when, having described the resurrection, he bursts forth in praise, saying, "Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." <sup>2</sup>

It is difficult for moderns who have lived within even the faintest glow of hope found in Christendom to appreciate the significance of such ringing doxologies and confessions. Only as such affirmations are viewed within the context of human despair may their true meaning be appreciated. Therefore let us turn to the world of thought outside Judeo-Christian tradition--that world which Paul characterized as "having no hope and without God." <sup>3</sup>

When one reads the intellectuals of the ancient world he may well be impressed by the accuracy of Paul's description. How little do such gifted men speak of hope! It is true that hope has a place in their vocabulary, but lacking Israel's conception of God's faithfulness they lacked also the conception of hope as steadfast confidence.

The dramatist Sophocles described hope as flitting about "on never-wearying wings."

Profit to some, to some light love she brings,  
But no man knows how her gifts may turn,  
Till 'neath his feet the treacherous ashes burn.

But if hope "flits about," Fate stalks inevitably. The chorus continues,

if evil good appear  
To any, Fate is near;  
And brief the respite from her flaming sword. <sup>4</sup>

The Roman Stoic Seneca likewise viewed Fate as possessing an irresistible quality. "Fate leads the willing follower, but drags the unwilling," he said. The best that one might do is to adjust to Fate, or to its sunnier side, Fortune, by not allowing its involvement in one's life to become existential. Writing to his mother Helvia upon the occasion of his exile, Seneca said,

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1. 1 Peter 1:3f

2. 1 Corinthians 15:57

3. Ephesians 2:12

4. Antigone, translated by F. Storr, lines 618-624



Never have I trusted Fortune, even when she seemed to be offering peace; the blessings she most fondly bestowed upon me-- money, office, and influence--I stored all of them in a place from which she could take them back without disturbing me. Between them and me I have kept a wide space; and so she has merely taken them, not torn them, from me. No man is crushed by hostile fortune who is not first deceived by her smiles. <sup>1</sup>

Even the crippled slave Epictetus, who was no stranger to "the power of positive thinking," recommended the following maxims:

Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny,  
The way that I am bid by you to go:  
To follow I am ready. If I choose not,  
I make myself a wretch, and still must follow.  
But whoso nobly yields unto necessity,  
We hold him wise, and skill'd in things divine. <sup>2</sup>

Nor are the "pagna" historians able to see in the historical process any measure of hope. Livy struggled in vain to awaken Rome to a new sense of social responsibility. Polybius, who spoke with such admiration of the Roman system, warned that even it would be subject to the inevitable cycle of change and decay. History was not going anywhere. While the prophets of Israel saw the righteous purpose of God seeking the use of human means toward the fulfillment of the creation, Tacitus could but say,

I find it hard to decide whether human affairs are governed by fate and inevitable destiny or by chance. <sup>3</sup>

While such sentiments might elicit admiration as being ingenious and even courageous adjustments to the "realities" of life, it is apparent that they are quite different from the great Biblical affirmations of hope.

A similar picture is seen when one notes the views of death which were common among the intellectuals of the first century Roman world. It is true that Plato depicts Socrates as confident that he would survive death. The doctrine of pre-existence which was part of the epistemology of the Phaedo was adduced as evidence of survival after death. If one lived before birth he could as well live after death.

Such a view was not adequate, however, for the Epicurean or Stoic. Epicurus was a pioneer in the study of psychic disorders and concluded (perhaps not altogether erroneously) that fear of death and religious belief were the chief sources

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1. Moral Essays, III

2. Encheiridion

3. Annals, vi, 22



of such disorders. Therefore he counselled,

Accustom thyself to believe that death is nothing to us, for good and evil imply sentence, and death is the privation of all sentence; therefore a right understanding that death is nothing to us makes the mortality of life enjoyable, not by adding to life an illimitable time, but by taking away the yearning after immortality.<sup>1</sup>

In this Epicurus is joined by Epictetus who said, "It is not death or hardship that is a fearful thing, but the fear of death and hardship."<sup>2</sup>

These thinkers would seem to counsel a certain psychological insentience toward the human conception of time or the human realization of the possibility of non-being. The one would take away the fear of death by affirming that the fear is more fearful than the death. The other would take away the fear of death by making void the yearning after immortality. Each view may possess certain logical validity, but neither satisfies man in his uniquely human situation. The question of being vs. non-being is not so easily disposed of. As Kierkegaard has noted, "Immortality is the most passionate interest of subjectivity."<sup>3</sup> Man's sense of existential involvement is not satisfied by artificially dehumanizing himself.

The Emperor Marcus Aurelius held a somewhat more optimistic view of prospects after death. He said,

To go away from among men, if there are gods, is not a thing to be afraid of, for the gods will not involve thee in evil; but if indeed they do not exist, or if they have no concern about human affairs, what is it to me to live in a universe devoid of gods or devoid of providence? But in truth they do exist, and they do care for human things, and they have put all the means in man's power to enable him not to fall into real evils.<sup>4</sup>

Such sentiments, noble as they are, fall far short of the Christian affirmation of hope. As Paul Tillich has said, "This large reception of Stoic ideas could not bridge the gap between the acceptance of cosmic resignation in Stoicism and the faith of cosmic salvation in Christianity."<sup>5</sup>

"Cosmic resignation" and "cosmic salvation." How different were these two world views! The fulness of time had come. Man seemed to have reached as far as he could without divine aid. Therefore, "God sent forth His Son."<sup>6</sup>

1. Diogenes Laertius, Epicurus, 125. Translated by R. D. Hicks.

2.

3. Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 155

4. Meditations, 11. Translated by George Long.

5. Being and Courage, 10

6. Galations 4:4



Tillich has characterized the ancient world as burdened by the "anxiety of fate and death," and the Middle Ages as burdened by the "anxiety of guilt or condemnation." The modern age, he says, is characterized by the "anxiety of emptiness or meaninglessness."<sup>1</sup> Let us now briefly trace this latter viewpoint.

When one turns to more recent times he yet finds multitudes for whom life holds no prospect. Some have for a while found respite from despair in following modern messiahs, only to have disillusionment lead to deeper despair. Others have sought to adjust to life without hope, forming rationales or systems which at worst simply give vent to deep resentment, or at best bring some momentary pleasure through artistic expression.

Although speaking from the Twelfth Century, the Persian poet, Omar Khayyam expressed with high artistry the very common modern view that all is cosmically determined. The poet says,

With Earth's first Clay They did the Last Man knead,  
And there of the Last Harvest sowed the Seed:  
And the first morning of Creation wrote  
What the Last Dawn of Reckoning shall read.<sup>2</sup>

Within this cosmic framework fact and time possess an irrevocable nature.

The Moving Finger writes: and, having writ,  
Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,<sup>3</sup>  
Nor all your Tears wash out a Word of it.

In such a view there is no awareness of a Divine Love which can erase the memory and redeem the consequence of human failure.

Within such a world the individual is but an expendable pawn in a cosmic game. Man is self-deluded when he thinks himself free, or possessed of eternal significance. God is the Great Checker-Player. In another verse Omar says,

But helpless Pieces of the Game He plays  
Upon this Chequer-board of Nights and Days;

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1. Tillich, *op cit*, 41  
Fitzgerald.

2. Rubaiyat, LXXLLL, Translated by Edward  
3. Rubaiyat, LXXI



Hither and thither moves, and checks, and slays,  
And one by one back in the Closet lays.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly such a conception of life leaves little place for hope. At most one may be a submissive pawn, and be mentally prepared to accept what comes ere he is placed back in the Closet."

Dare one hope to be better used in the next game? Some moderns would reply, There is no "next game." So Nietzsche, to whom belongs the dubious distinction of having announced that "God is dead," has Zarathustra, the prophet of Superman, say to the multitude,

I conjure you, my brethren, remain true to the earth, and believe not those who speak unto you of superearthly hopes! Poisoners are they, whether they know it or not.

Despisers of life are they, decaying ones and poisoned ones themselves, of whom the earth is weary: so away with them.<sup>2</sup>

But if man has no "superearthly hope," and if those who embraced Nietzsche's Superman have produced no "earthly hope," what is left for mankind? James Thomson has sought to answer this question by affirming that even in a world where hope is dead man may still find comfort. In his City of the Dreadful Night Thomson says,

When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed,  
Can Life still live? By what do it proceed?

...  
This life itself holds nothing good for us,  
But it ends soon and nevermore can be;  
And we know nothing of it ere our birth,  
And shall know nothing when consigned to earth;  
I ponder these thoughts and they comfort me.<sup>3</sup>

But how can such an answer truly comfort, or satisfy the "anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness?" It is most certainly inadequate for those whose thoughts are expressed by the Spanish philosopher Miquel de Unamuno, who said,

If it is nothingness that awaits us, let us make an injustice of it;  
let us fight against destiny, even though without hope of victory;  
let us fight against it quixotically.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Rubaiyat, LXIX

2. Thus Spake Zarathustra, Prologue, Section 3

3. The City of the Dreadful Night, XVI

4. The Tragic Sense of Life, Translated by J.E. Crawford Fitch.



To Unamuno it is not enough to bid the yearning heart comfort in prospect that both yearning and the one who yearns will be obliterated by death. Small consolation this! Better to face the possibility of non-being heroically! Better to protest the injustice of an order in which yearning can exist without possibility of fulfillment. This pitiful struggle of human concern amidst indifferent circumstances may be considered quixotic --like fighting windmills--but it is more honest existentially than taking "comfort" in the prospect of non-being.

Unamuno is not attracted by prospects of "comfort" at the expense of life. He would rather choose suffering, for it is at least being. "Suffering tells us that we exist," he says. It is not anguish which "discovers God to us." In such "religious anguish" lies the "tragic sense of life." <sup>1</sup>

Jean Paul Sartre, the French existentialist, does not find life so tragic as it is sickening. Since Sartre believes God to be dead one's own existence is an absurdity. Life has neither purpose nor meaning. Everything is "de trop"--superfluous. The town one lives in, the garden in which he sits is "gratuitous". "I, too, am 'de trop'" he says. The realization that life is meaninglessness makes one sick. This is "la nausée." Sartre can only respond to such a life with horror, disgust, and revulsion. <sup>2</sup>

What is the significance of the fact that such a philosophy should become popular in a highly favored age like this? It would seem that Paul Tillich gives the basic answer to this question when he says, "The decisive event which underlies the search for meaning and the despair of it in the 20th century is the loss of God in the 19th Century." <sup>3</sup> Apart from God man is 'dehumanized.' In despair he accepts, or fights, or is sickened, not realizing that even his despair is evidence of his uniqueness.

Thus, in spite of marvelous achievements many in our age like those of the first century are "without God and without hope in the world."

It is the task of the Christian Church to proclaim hope to this generation. Not the hope of the soothsayer, however, who formulates his doctrines according to the wishes of men. Rather, it is the task of the Church to proclaim that hope which intruded upon human despair and challenged it as light challenges darkness. Christ is the light which the darkness does not overcome.

The hope which Christ brings is rooted in the revelation of an existence the reality of which is beyond the commonly accepted categories of life and death. That reality known as the resurrection confronted with strange, yet

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1. Ibid

2. See Jean Paul Sartre, La nausée, Paris: Gallimard, 1938, 163f

3. Tillich, op cit, 142



convincing evidence disciples for whom hope had vanished. "We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel," said the two on the road to Emmaus.<sup>1</sup> "They have taken away my Lord," wept Mary.<sup>2</sup> "I will not believe," said Thomas.<sup>3</sup> And, as if to prove their integrity, the gospels record that even at the ascension "some doubted."<sup>4</sup>

Strangeness is mingled with familiarity in the accounts of the resurrection, but the familiarity overcame the strangeness. The inflection in the word "Mary" had belonged only to Jesus. Jesus suddenly appeared in a room closed for fear, and confronted Thomas with nail prints and spear scar. Although the disciples on the Emmaus road did not then recognize the Stranger who joined them, the familiar act of breaking bread opened their eyes to his identity. As they hastened back to Jerusalem to tell the good news they said, "Was not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures?"<sup>5</sup>

In a day when the mystical and historical are sometimes set contrary to one another, or when the factual record is treated as a product of the subject wish, it is instructive to note that it was through the breaking of the bread--the visible fact--they understood the meaning of the inner experience--their burning hearts. "He was known of them in the breaking of the bread." After His disappearance the broken bread remained before them as evidence that it was He. So Christian hope partakes of both the historical and the mystical.

It is important that this relationship between fact and experience be understood. The view that the "fact" of the resurrection was invented to symbolize the rebirth of hope apart from such a fact is an inadequate explanation both of the apostolic faith and of modern despair. If it be said that the fact of the resurrection is unacceptable because it has not been observed within our generation, where in our generation has despair given way to hope without fact?

Why should it be assumed that the disillusionment which followed the cross was more creative than the disillusionment of modern man? When a Sartre creates out of his despair a hope as victorious as that of the early Church we shall be prepared to consider the assertion that the disciples created from the despair of Calvary the proclamation of the resurrection. But as long as modern despair remains uncreative we have no cause to assume that the despair of the first century disciples was creative. Put in another fashion, the uncreativity of modern despair is but evidence of the resurrection. Something must have happened between sundown that Friday

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1. Luke 24:21

2. John 20:13f

3. John 20:24,25

4. Matthew 28:17

5. Luke 24:28f



and sunrise the following Sunday which changed the despair of the disciples into hope.

There remain, however, many moderns to whom the resurrection is unthinkable because it is historical. The categories of their world view do not allow such a thing. Perhaps Omar Khayyam had never heard the Gospel when he wrote,

Strange is it not? that of the myriads who  
Before us passed the door of Darkness through,  
Not one returns to tell us of the Road,  
Which to discover we must travel too. <sup>1</sup>

But if the poet's desire had been fulfilled, and someone returned from the dead, in what terms must such an event have been couched in order to speak to modern man? In a sense "we are all Greeks", and like the Athenians are anxious to hear "some new things,"--but not that new. There are some things so "new" as not to fit into our world view. These we often exclude by definition.

For example, it is a commonly accepted historical cannon that the more unusual the event the greater the evidence needed to substantiate it. But some, such as David Hume, would say that by definition no amount of historical evidence is adequate to establish the historicity of the resurrection. <sup>2</sup>

We are all prone to universalize the limitations of our own experience. Like the inhabitants of Plato's Cave we so close our minds as to make it impossible for anyone who may have been outside in the sunlight to tell us what it is like. Therefore we must take care lest by definition of what is possible we limit the bounds of history.

The proper question for modern man to ask is not, Is resurrection possible? but, Did it happen? We do not know enough to decree what is possible in the universe. We do well to learn what is, or what has happened.

It was to a similar attitude among the Corinthians that Paul addressed the question, "How say some of you that the dead are not raised?" He then traced the logical implications of this view, showing that this would mean Christ is not risen, and we are therefore, "yet in our sins," for the cross and the resurrection are one redemptive act. "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life," he says, "we are of all men most pitiable." <sup>3</sup>

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1. Rubaiyat LXIV

2. Hume's hypercriticism was well answered in Archbishop Whately's satirical pamphlet, Historical Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte. In it Whately, who wrote in 1815, used Hume's criteria of Biblical criticism to "prove" that Napoleon had never existed!

3. 1 Corinthians 15:12f



But it is noteworthy that Paul did not consequently affirm the resurrection in order to avoid such despair. He did not say, "But Christ must be risen from the dead." Rather, he said, "But now Christ is risen from the dead." This affirmation is grounded in evidence which Paul had earlier presented to the Corinthians. That this evidence was historical could not mean that human response to it must be a response of faith, for all history--yes all knowledge--involves faith.

But something more than historical acquiescence or belief is required of the Christian. He must make the commitment whereby he identifies himself with the events of Christ's passion. We confess that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures," and that He was "raised for (or because of) our justification." We not only believe that Christ is risen, but that in His resurrection we are "given the victory."

Our hope does not rest alone in the solitary triumph of Messiah, but in our identification with Him. "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." His triumph is historical. Our identification with Him is mystical. Thus, both the historical and the mystical are essential aspects of the Christian hope.

Failure to retain the unity of the historical and mystical deprives hope of its vitality. When the objectivity of the Gospel and the Church have been emphasized to the detriment of the spiritual, the Church may grow as an institution of the world, but she fails as the bearer of hope.

This was the weakness which Kierkegaard saw in the established Church of his time. The Church and the message it proclaimed were too objective. Correct doctrine and proper sacraments did not of themselves bring inner peace. But Kierkegaard's reaction went too far, for he tended to emphasize the mystical at the expense of the historical. One's own existence became the ground of knowledge and therefore of hope. That this is inadequate is made evident by the appearance of modern atheistic existentialism.

Kierkegaard found the historical an insufficient ground of hope because it involves belief in testimony rather than immediate awareness of truth. "The individual is tragic," he said, "because of his passion for eternal life, and comical because he attaches it to an approximation." By "approximation" he meant historical testimony.

What then constituted Kierkegaard's basis for hope? It was found in this very "passion" for immortality.



Systematically, immortality cannot be proved at all...Immortality is the most passionate interest of subjectivity; precisely in the interest lies the proof.<sup>1</sup>

Certainly, man's "passionate interest" in immortality is very significant for this question. But it is difficult to see that of itself it constitutes "proof" of immortality any more than does the historical evidence of the resurrection. Indeed, as we have noted above, in the thinking of some this "passionate interest" constitutes the ultimate irony.

But we are not here really concerned with "proofs," for the very nature of hope is beyond "proof." "Hope that is seen is not hope."<sup>2</sup> Hope involves faith--patient and heroic faith. Faith is created and strengthened by the union of the historical and mystical. We do wrongly to suppose that faith and hope must rest in one or the other.

It is when the "passionate interest" in immortality is deprived of the assurance found in Christ's resurrection that the "passionate interest" is turned into bitterness and despair. Epicurus could speak optimistically of the rationalization whereby the "yearning after immortality" could be taken away. The truth, however, is that the yearning will not die. Unless it finds an adequate answer it becomes a mockery.

Then let the answer be heard! "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." So the Christian Gospel interprets for man the meaning of his despair and presents to him the event which provides the objective complement to his existential yearning. Faith is transformed into hope as the Risen One, the Object of our Faith becomes our Hope.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Kierkegaard, op cit, 155

2. Romans 8:24

3. 1 Peter 1:3



## THE LIFE OF HOPE

"Christ in you, the hope of glory"

Jesus Christ, whose revelation in history is the Ground of Hope, only becomes meaningful to us when we relate ourselves to Him in faith. It is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."<sup>1</sup>

This life of hope has three important aspects, the first of which is,

### I HOPE AS MYSTICAL UNION WITH CHRIST

The life of hope is born in the union of the believer with the Risen Christ. This union is made possible through the grace of God, who brought forth from the dead "the great shepherd of the sheep."<sup>2</sup> Being invested with every man. So His resurrection has "begotten us again unto a living hope."<sup>3</sup>

Such a divine "breakthrough" into human affairs was contemplated of old, but the decisive character of Messiah's victory over death could hardly be appreciated before the event took place. Thus the continued ministry of the Living Christ was a "mystery" only revealed through His resurrection. So it is written, "God was pleased to make known what is the riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

That those who walked with Jesus upon earth were highly privileged we have all believed. Yet Jesus clearly taught that the promised life in Him which would come through the gift of the Holy Spirit was more to be desired. "It is expedient for you that I go away," He said, "for if I go not away the Comforter will not come. But if I go away I will send him unto you."<sup>4</sup> So the objective Ground of Hope would become the subjective Life of Hope through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ our Hope would be received into ourselves and remain an abiding Presence.

Of this union Paul says,

If Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Col. 1:27  
<sup>2</sup>Heb. 13:20  
<sup>3</sup>1 Pet. 1:3

<sup>4</sup>Jn. 16:7  
<sup>5</sup>Rom. 8:10, 11



While such an infusion of the Divine Life is initiated by grace, it must be received by free, moral choice. For this reason the mystical union with Christ is essentially and intensely personal. The whole man intellectual, emotional, and volitional--is involved in the commitment whereby this grace is received.

This is the significance of Christian baptism, wherein the whole person is committed to Christ the Lord in the figure of His death, in hope of sharing with him the "likeness of His resurrection."<sup>1</sup> The act of immersion is the appointed way of expressing this faith, but only as it does express faith does immersion become an assurance of hope.

Kierkegaard has made a genuine contribution to our understanding of the life of hope through his insistence upon the personal quality of such choice. To him this was the "infinite" decision which was consistent only with adult baptism.<sup>2</sup> No external form or institutional connection could serve as a substitute for this personal choice. "He who has an objective Christianity and none other," says Kierkegaard, "is eo ipso a pagan, for Christianity is precisely an affair of spirit, and so of subjectivity, and so of inwardness."<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, philosophical speculation is no substitute for the commitment of faith. Kierkegaard says elsewhere,

If the speculative philosopher is at the same time a believer, as is also affirmed, he must long ago have perceived that philosophy can never acquire the same significance for him as faith. It is precisely as a believer that he is infinitely interested in his eternal happiness, and it is in faith that he is assured of it.<sup>4</sup>

But if philosophical speculation is inadequate for hope, so is simple doctrinal acquiescence. In a day when "defence of the faith" increasingly occupies our attention it is important to note that "the faith" can be academically "defended" without faith. As Emil Brunner has said,

One could very well be a skilled theologian who could make subtle distinctions between the concepts of pure and corrupt doctrine without having real, living faith.<sup>5</sup>

We of the Restoration Movement must mark well this warning. It is quite possible to be doctrinally correct while making no more commitment to what is apprehended doctrinally than one may make to that which is speculated philosophically.

1. Rom. 6:1f

2. Concluding Unscientific Postscript, 37, 43

3. Ibid., 42

4. Ibid., 53

5. Divine-Human Encounter, 192



Correct doctrine is an important concern of the Church, but not as an end in itself. The Church should be concerned for purity of doctrine because doctrine edifies faith; and it is by faith that the just shall live. Doctrinal purity does not of itself create true hope. It is faith, enlightened by pure doctrine, which creates and sustains hope.

The subtle shift which takes place when correct doctrine is made the basis of our hope is not always discerned by disciples. This shift makes our hope to be in our comprehension--that is, in ourselves. We have hope because "we are right." This is the hope of the Pharisee--a hope dependent upon our own "infallibility." When our "rightness" becomes the basis of hope instead of His righteousness, we dare not admit of any error, since this would make us feel insecure in our hope. Thanking God that we are "not as other men," we vigorously, and sometimes belligerently, defend our rightness, instead of resting in God's grace while we seek His truth.

On the other hand, when our hope springs from faith which is edified by doctrinal apprehension, our hope is not in the adequacy of our apprehension, but in the adequacy of the One whom we apprehend--the Lord Jesus Christ. "I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day."<sup>1</sup> This is the hope of discipleship--a hope which acknowledges our frailty and fallibility, but confesses His sufficiency and grace. This is the hope which belongs to the true children of Abraham, who "believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness."<sup>2</sup>

In the mystical union of the life of hope the Holy Spirit performs a gracious ministry of confirmation.

The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him.<sup>3</sup>

The witness of the Spirit is confirmed to us as we are faithful to His word, receptive of His gifts, and possessed of His fruits.

The life of hope is discovered when faith's response to the Gospel makes possible the union of the believer with the Living Christ. So having

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1. II Tim. 1:12

2. Rom. 4:3

3. Rom. 8:16



"access by faith into this grace wherein we stand . . . we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."<sup>1</sup> The ministry of the Holy Spirit encourages this life of hope.

As it is written, "Christ in you" is "the hope of glory."

## II HOPE AS DAILY AFFIRMATION

If the life of hope is rooted in mystical union with Christ, it is realized in daily affirmation. While the gift of grace in Christ makes hope possible, and the promise of triumph in Christ gives hope direction, it is in daily affirmation that hope lives.

Hope is more than passive reception of a gift, or passive expectation of a promise. Hope is positive affirmation whereby one who has received the Ground of Hope casts himself into daily life toward the fulfilment of hope. Hope's yearning becomes hope's willing; hope's willing becomes hope's doing. Hope as daily affirmation is faith's YES to life.

Faith's affirmation of hope is well exemplified in Abraham. Long after both he and Sarah were passed the normal years of childbearing God promised that he would become "a father of many nations." From the human standpoint this seemed well nigh impossible. But Abraham's faith was such that he grasped the hope of the promised even though it was greater than the hope of the possible. "In hope" he "believed against hope."<sup>2</sup> His "Yes" to God's promise made possible the birth of Isaac, and the ultimate fulfilment of the promise.

As with Abraham, so with us. Every day calls for new affirmations of hope. At times these are the simple and commonplace affirmations: One's daily work--playing with the children--helping a neighbor--studying a lesson.

At other times we may be called to affirm our hope as we lie upon a bed of pain--turn away from the grave of a loved one--bear in silence unfair criticism--be courageous when afraid--bless with a smile another life when our own hearts are heavy. So we also may be challenged to affirm hope which believes against hope.

Hope as daily affirmation is creative--not in the sense of making something from nothing; but in making what is not yet, from what is.

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1. Rom. 5:2

2. Rom. 4:3



All creative living involves hope. "He that ploweth ought to plow in hope, and he that thresheth, to thresh in hope of partaking."<sup>1</sup> Despair is non-creative, having neither motive nor purpose. Despair can only negate, and leaves life unfulfilled like an unplanted seed. But the life of hope creatively "redeems the time."<sup>2</sup> Believing in the possibility of a harvest it affirms itself in the planting of "good seed." It is hope which releases the potential which God has placed in life.

This is the significance of stewardship. In faith we confess that we do not own the things we possess, but that these have been entrusted to us for a redemptive purpose. "Occupy till I come," are the words of the Master. Hope is affirmed in the creative use of possessions. By such stewardship others are redeemed, and become to us "treasures in heaven."<sup>3</sup>

It is significant that the source of the unfaithful steward's digression was his loss of hope. "My lord delays his coming," he said. With that loss of hope a completely different philosophy of life was formed. Immediate interests rather than ultimate concerns came to determine his choices and decisions. Without hope talents, days, and possessions lose significance, and creativity dies.

Were the hope of the average Christian more vital his stewardship would be more faithful. For this reason the blessing is pronounced upon the servant "whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."<sup>4</sup>

Hope is also affirmed in testimony. This testimony is of two types: evangelical, and edifying. Evangelical testimony is the witness the Church gives to the world. Edifying testimony is the witness whereby the Church perfects herself. Let us first note the affirmation of hope in evangelical testimony.

It was perhaps natural that the disciples before Jesus' ascension should have been anxious for hope's fulfillment. They asked him, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"<sup>5</sup> Jesus replied that it was not given to them to know the "times and seasons" which were in God's authority, but it was given to them to be His witnesses "unto the uttermost part of the earth." Leaving the ultimate consummation in the hands of God, Jesus called them to the daily affirmation of hope in evangelical testimony.

In keeping with this commandment the apostolic Church bore its witness faithfully. On Pentecost Peter affirmed the hope when he proclaimed the remission of sins for those who would receive the Christ.<sup>6</sup> Again at the

1. 1.Cor. 9:10

2. Eph. 5:16

3. Lk. 19:13; Mt. 6:19f

4. Mt. 24:45

5. Ac. 1:6f

6. Ac. 2:37f



Beautiful Gate he affirmed hope to the crippled beggar saying, "Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."<sup>1</sup> On Solomon's Porch he called the multitudes to repentance, promising that so there would come "seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord . . ."<sup>2</sup>

In the face of persecution the early Church refused to surrender to despair. Beseeching the Lord's help they affirmed their hope the more. Scattered abroad, they went everywhere "preaching the word." So faithful was their affirmation that those who died for the faith became known as "martyrs" -- "witnesses."

The affirmation of hope in martyrdom had especial power. So Stephen's death contributed to the conversion of Paul who in turn affirmed the hope from the huts of the humble to the thrones of the mighty. With such passion did he speak before Agrippa that the king said, "With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian." Paul replied, "I would to God, that whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except these bonds."<sup>3</sup>

The evangelical testimony of the Church has always been proportionate to the fervency of its hope, for as is our hope, so is our affirmation. Therefore the exhortation, "Sanctify in your hearts Christ as Lord" -- is this not a description of hope as mystical union? -- and, the word continues, be "ready always to give answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you, yet with meekness and fear."<sup>4</sup>

The edifying testimony of the Church is also an affirmation of hope. There is a "divine dissatisfaction" which serves as a corollary to hope. This dissatisfaction arises from the revelation of the "divine possibility" that the Church may attain "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."<sup>5</sup> Therefore it "speaks the truth in love" in order that it may "grow up" into Christ.

Hope can but affirm the testimony whereby this may be fulfilled, even if hope must suffer in so doing. Thus Paul exclaimed to the Galatians, "My little children, of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!"<sup>6</sup> And to Timothy he wrote, "I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Where hope has lost its vitality one can easily be content to let the Church drift in complacency, but when one has seen the vision of the "divine possibility" of the Church hope can but call the Church to her fulfillment.

1. Ac. 3:6

2. Ac. 3:19f

3. Ac. 26:38, 29

4. I Pet. 3:15

5. Eph. 4:13 f

6. Gal. 4:19

7. II Tim. 2:10



Hope is also affirmed in worship. We have previously noted that such affirmations often take the form of doxologies, and it was but natural that such would be the early hymnody of the Church. Hear the beautiful hymn quoted by Paul:

Faithful is the saying: For if we died with him, we shall also live with him: if we endure, we shall also reign with him: if we shall deny him, he also will deny us: if we are faithless, he abideth faithful; for he cannot deny himself.<sup>1</sup>

Today we sing,

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word!  
What more can He say than to you He has said,  
You who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?

Or, we may make affirmation in the hymn,

My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name

.....

His oath, His covenant, His blood,  
Support me in the whelming flood;  
When all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my hope and stay.

Disciples also affirm their hope in worship at the Lord's Table. As the Saviour transformed the loaf and cup of the Passover into symbols of His own sacrifice, He said, "I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."<sup>2</sup> So we commemorate His death "till He comes." In the act of participation we confess our faith, commune in His life, and affirm our hope. The anxiety of life cannot abide the Lord's Supper, for therein perfect love is perfect love is portrayed, and "perfect love casteth out fear."<sup>3</sup>

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1. II Tim. 2:11-13

2. Mt. 26:29

3. I Jn. 4:18



Prayer is another important affirmation of hope. Believing God to be both concerned and able, we are bold to approach the "throne of grace," and ask in our time of need. The prayer which Jesus uttered on the cross symbolizes for all disciples the commitment of such affirmation: "Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit."

Often it may be that hope can be affirmed in no other way. Knowing so little of the future, as well of the present imponderables of life, the disciple may find difficulty in praying as he ought. In such times it is comforting to be assured of the help of the Holy Spirit, who "himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."<sup>1</sup> From such prayer comes the confidence that "to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose."<sup>2</sup>

At other times, however, the disciple may have reason to believe that he does know that for which he should pray. In such instances hope becomes specific, and prayer as affirmation of hope should be specific. An example of such prayer is recorded by Paul in the Roman Letter:

I beseech you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me: that I may be delivered from them that are disobedient in Judea, and that my ministration which I have for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints; that I may come unto you in joy through the will of God, and together with you find rest.<sup>3</sup>

But what becomes of hope affirmed in prayer when prayer is not answered in the terms which hope expressed? Perhaps a major reason for our hesitance to pray specifically and with courageous commitment is because we fear that hope may be disappointed if our prayers are not answered as we would.

The prayer which we have just quoted is instructive for this question. The four specific hopes embodied in Paul's prayer were answered, but at least three of them were fulfilled in different ways than he had envisioned.

He was delivered from the Jewish authorities in Judea, but only by the intervention of Roman authority. The brethren did "receive us gladly" reports

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1. Rom. 8:26

2. Rom. 8:28

3. Rom. 15:30-32



Luke of their arrival in Jerusalem, but no special note is taken of the offering which they brought for the needy. Paul came indeed unto the Romans "in joy through the will of God," but that journey had involved arrest, trials, shipwreck, and great suffering. Paul did "find rest" in Rome, but it was the "rest" of imprisonment, chained day and night to a Roman soldier.

What, then, was the result of Paul's affirmation of hope in prayer? He himself answers this question in the Philippian Letter when he says,

Now I would have you know, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the progress of the gospel; so that my bonds became manifest in Christ throughout the whole praetorian guard, and to all the rest; and that most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear.

As for the opposition he had encountered among some disciples, Paul said,

What then? only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and therein I rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn out to my salvation, through your supplication and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Here it is evident that Paul considered his affirmation of hope in prayer more than fulfilled. God had indeed done "exceeding abundantly" above all that he could ask or think.<sup>2</sup> It is true that events had not happened in the way which he had anticipated, but God's fulfilment of human hope is not limited to the plans men may make for that fulfilment. Hope transcends plan, for plan is limited to human wisdom while hope rests in God's wisdom. God's answer to Paul's prayer was more wonderful than his prayer.

The realization that hope's fulfilment is not limited to our frail wisdom and strength. Enables one to accept the disappointments of life without loss of hope itself. The "thorn in the flesh" is turned into a blessing. Thus one

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1. Phil. 1:12-21

2. Eph. 3:20



may learn the secret "both to be filled and to be hungry, both to abound and to be in want"--to "do all things" through Christ who supplies every need.<sup>1</sup>

Hope so affirmed is rooted in existential acceptance of Jesus' word: "Be not anxious . . . your Father knows."<sup>2</sup> It is expressed in the prayer that God's will "be done, as in heaven, so on earth;" and is content to ask only for one's daily bread.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Alexander Pope's "Universal Prayer" it says,

This day be bread and peace my lot:  
All else beneath the sun,  
Thou know'st if best bestowed or not,  
And let thy will be done.

Hope affirmed in such prayer is indeed a "helmet" of the soul.<sup>4</sup> It creates the spiritual health which can throw off the sickness of despair. Even in adversity it still can sing, "Thanks be unto God, who always leadeth us in triumph in Christ."<sup>5</sup>

Hope which affirms itself in creative and devotional life is also affirmed in joy. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God."<sup>6</sup> There is a joy which men may know apart from faith. This is the joy which may be found in the immediate moment of pleasure, but such joy is limited only to the pleasant and to the moment of pleasure. It is purely passive, being the effect of fortunate circumstance.

But the joy which partakes of hope is limited neither to the pleasant nor to the momentary. It is even able to live amidst suffering or tribulation because hope grants the perspective whereby these may be found creative of life. Note this process as traced by Paul:

We also rejoice in our tribulations: knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope: and hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us.

Joy without hope is overwhelmed and cast into despair by tribulation. But joy with hope is able to initiate the creative sequence whereby one may pass through tribulation unto love, the crown of life.

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1. Phil. 4:11-13, 19

2. Mt. 6:31, 32

3. Mt. 6:10, 11

4. I Thes. 5:8

5. II Cor. 2:14

6. Rom. 5:2

7. Rom. 5:3-5



The Saviour is Himself our example in the affirmation of hope in joy. Of Him it is said that "for the joy set before Him" He endured the cross and despised its shame.<sup>1</sup> From Christ's Passion we can learn that the affirmation of hope in joy is not a cheap or shallow experience. There is nothing here of the artificial auto-suggestion which seeks to create a world of make-believe happiness. His Passion partook of the deepest spiritual agony expressed in the lonely cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"<sup>2</sup>

The uniqueness of this saying on the cross is found in the fact that although Christ felt Himself forsaken He affirmed that God was still His God. His refusal to surrender to despair made it possible for His suffering to be redemptive. Because His suffering was redemptive hope could grant joy in the midst of agony.

So today, when we make our tribulations redemptive, hope is affirmed in joy.

It remains for us to note that the affirmation of hope has purifying power. The highest worship is to seek to be like God. Therefore hope is affirmed in godliness. John says,

Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is.<sup>3</sup>

Possessed of such a promise hope affirms itself in the sanctification and edification of personal life. Sin is not attractive when one lives the life of hope, for "everyone that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."<sup>4</sup>

Thus the life of holiness is an affirmation of hope. As is our hope, so is our holiness.

### III HOPE AS PATIENT EXPECTANCY

The life of hope is not fully comprehended in mystical union with Christ, and in daily affirmation. While each of these aspects of hope must be vitally contemporary they both possess potentiality which can not be fulfilled within the context of our present existence. It is true that "if we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied."<sup>5</sup>

1. Heb. 12:2

4. I Jn. 3:3

2. Mt. 27:46

5. I Cor. 15:19

3. I Jn. 3:2



But we are not therefore cast into despair as those who have "no hope," for the scriptures have called our attention to the eschatological aspect of hope--the anticipation of the thrilling events to be revealed in the Second Coming of Christ.

As it contemplates these things hope which is mystical union and daily affirmation becomes Patient Expectancy. It is expectant because it awaits what God has promised. But it must also be patient because God has kept the "times and seasons" within His own authority. The tension between patience and expectancy gives vibrance to the life of hope.

The alternative between the life of faith and the life without faith is nowhere more obvious. Shall the realization that man has more potential than can be fulfilled in time plunge us into despair at the seeming meaninglessness and mockery of life? Or shall faith lay hold of that incompleteness in hope, find meaning through living in the present redemptively, and in patient expectancy await fulfilment in God's time? These alternatives are not academic, but vital. Every man must determine what his choice will be

The patriarchs of old chose hope as patient expectancy. Of them it is written,

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. And if indeed they had been mindful of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city.

The Christian corollary to such patriarchal faith is expressed by the apostle in the Philippian Letter when he says,

Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself yet to have laid hold: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are full-grown, be thus minded.<sup>2</sup>

1. Heb. 11:12-16

2. Phil. 3:12-16



Hope as patient expectancy is a stabilizing power within a distressed world. It is indeed, "an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil."<sup>1</sup> While confessing that now we but "see through a glass darkly" and only "know in part," we await with confidence the day when we shall see "face to face" and "know as we are known."

In such hopeful expectation one is encouraged to fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith.<sup>2</sup>

Let us then cultivate that mystical union with Christ, that daily affirmation in Him, and that patient expectancy of Him which constitutes the Life of Hope.

So may it be "Christ in you, the hope of Glory."

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1. Heb. 6:18, 19

2. II Tim. 4:7, 8



## THE COMMUNITY OF HOPE

"Hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us."  
Rom. 5:5

As the New Israel of God, the Church is the Community of Hope. We are 'called in one hope,"<sup>1</sup> and in one hope do we live. This life of hope we have seen to be found both in mystical union and daily affirmation. Love is the primary fruit which flows from that union with Christ, and the primary expression whereby hope is affirmed.

The "one hope of our calling" is an aspect of the unity of the Church. However, it is not simple agreement in one hope which constitutes that unity, but the affirmation of one hope in love. It is this which makes the Church the community of hope.

The love whereby the community affirms its hope is at the same time the mark whereby the community confirms its hope. We know that we have hope because we have love. Note carefully the sequence of thought in our text: "Hope putteth not to shame," or "does not disappoint us" (RSV); "because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit..." Here a present fact--"hope does not disappoint us"--becomes assurance of hope's future fulfillment. A corollary to this may be found in the declaration of John: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."<sup>2</sup>

Hope is therefore by nature communal. The Scripture is replete with such language: "Christ our hope;" "Since we believe;" "What is our hope?" "We shall not all sleep;" "Apart from us they should not be made perfect;" "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God." The sharing of life which is natural to hope was well expressed by Moses, when he said to Hobab,

We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.<sup>3</sup>

It is therefore appropriate that as we consider "Christ our Hope," we should speak of Christ's Church, "The Community of Hope."

### I THE BEARER OF THE WORD

As the community of hope, the Church is the bearer of the Word. The Good News of God's mighty acts in Christ is the message whereby believers

1. Eph. 4:4

2. 1 Jno. 3:14

3. Num. 10:29



are "called in one hope." So the Church is the "called out"--the fellowship which is created and continually renewed by the Gospel.

These acts of God in Christ performed upon the plane of history possess timeless dimension because of their meaning. The Gospel proclaims that "Christ died for our sins,"<sup>1</sup> and was "raised for our justification."<sup>2</sup> Here is a mystery of cosmic proportions in that one could die for all, and all could live because of one. But mystery though it be, it is sealed in the blood of witnesses whose testimony is committed to the Church. The Church bears the memory of her Savior, and in that memory lives in hope.

The testimony entrusted to the Church received form in the New Testament record and in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the Word and sacraments the Gospel is declared and exhibited for all men to see. Hope comes as a consequence of belief in the Christ who is so proclaimed.

The Church is therefore not only the community which remembers Jesus, but the community which awaits Jesus. So Paul affirmed to the Thessalonians:

If we believe that Jesus dies and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him.<sup>3</sup>

As with them, so with us. "if we believe" what God has done, "even so" we may anticipate what God will do.

The Cross and the Resurrection are central to human hope. It is marvelous that God should have taken man's ultimate act of sin and have transformed it by grace into the ultimate act of redemption. Yet this is the testimony entrusted to the Church. The blood which bespeaks human guilt is also the blood which bespeaks the outpouring of divine love; and divine love is greater than human guilt.

So the "Church under the Cross"<sup>4</sup> speaks to a world lost in meaninglessness and despair. It is a community of hope, bearing the ministry of reconciliation, and beseeching men, "Be ye reconciled to God."

Come, ye disconsolate, where'er ye languish;  
Come, at the mercy seat fervently kneel;  
Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish;  
Earth has no sorrow that heav'n cannot heal.<sup>5</sup>

The assurance that God's grace through the cross is greater than our

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1. I Cor. 15:1f      2. Rom. 5:25      3. I Thes. 4:14

4. See Tillich, op cit, 188

5. Thomas Moore



sin in the cross is found in the resurrection of Christ. He was raised "for" or "because of" our justification. The resurrection is the "breaking through" of a principle of life not subject to death, and it is therefore a ground of hope in this life.

To assert that the resurrection simply consists of the "proclamation" of the resurrection, and not in the historical event itself, is to deprive the cross of its meaning and assurance. It may well be that the symbols of human language are inadequate fully to convey such an event, but the "eventness" is not thereby to be discountenanced.

Both the cross and the resurrection are joined in the thought and witness of the early Church. Textually, it is impossible to separate the two in the New Testament. This witness was born in spite of the fact that the cross offended the Jew and the resurrection offended the Greek. The apostolic Church was not intimidated in its proclamation by these Hebrew and Greek conceptions. The Church discerned clearly that there was but one Gospel, grounded in one great saving event, of which the cross and resurrection were the two factual aspects.

As the cross and the resurrection were one saving event, baptism and the Lord's Supper are divinely appointed affirmations of one hope. These were entrusted to the Church as means whereby faith's response to the Word may be made visible. Each looks backward in memory, and each looks forward to hope.

Thus, the Gospel, the Sacraments, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit mark the Church as the Bearer of the Word, and the Community of Hope.

## II THE FELLOWSHIP OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The Church is also the community of hope in that it is the fellowship of encouragement. The "love of God...shed abroad in our hearts" beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."<sup>2</sup> Encouragement and consolation are the "life-process" of the community of hope.

But the fellowship of encouragement is not that association misnamed "fellowship" which is created by building fences. Fences do not encourage, but judge and condemn. The fellowship of encouragement is the free and unhindered offering of life unto others in the name of Christ. Since such

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1. See Richard Niebuhr's Resurrection and Historical Reason

2. I Cor. 13:7



offering can only be one of life to life, the fellowship of encouragement has its center in the congregation of believers. For this reason the congregation is of the essence of the Church.

The experience of every disciple is a mosaic of various shades of joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, strength and weakness, trial and peace. At times we live on the mountaintops of inspiration, and wish we could build our tabernacles there. But life does not stand still, and we all at times find our lot in the valley of human need and despair.

In such periods of life the fellowship of encouragement can provide perspective to one who cannot "see the way out," or solace and strength to one who may feel he cannot go on. At all times we stand in need of such fellowship, whether in the giving whereby we receive, or in the receiving whereby we gain new strength to give.

While it is true that in the ultimate sense "each man shall bear his own burden," the community of hope which is motivated by love can provide that encouragement which makes the bearing of one's burden less difficult. For this reason we are exhorted, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

The Lord is Himself our example in the fellowship of encouragement. Within the very shadow of the cross He who was soon to agonize in Gethsemane said to His distressed followers, "Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me."<sup>2</sup> Well might they rather have consoled the Savior, but they did not at that time understand the fellowship of encouragement. How many in the Church today yet do not understand this!

But the example of Jesus was not altogether lost upon the disciples, for after they received the Holy Spirit they learned the meaning of the fellowship of encouragement. So Paul exhorted the saints in Rome, saying,

We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying. For Christ also pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell upon me. For whatsoever things were written aforetimes were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Gal. 6:5,2

2. Jn. 14:1

3. Rom. 15:1f



"We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." But who is strong? Are we not all weak and in need? Whence, then, the sense of strength? It comes from the awareness of another's need. Herein is found the firm psychological foundation of the fellowship of Christ. No one is "strong" alone. No one is by himself adequate. But the awareness of another's needs grants strength to meet that need. Concern provides courage. As is our concern, so is our adequacy.

As the Christ who faced Calvary could speak consolation to His distressed disciples, so let us learn after Him. The fellowship of encouragement is fulfilled in the ministry of the weak who are made strong in ministry to the weak.

As the community of hope, the Church must not only mediate the "courage to be" but the "encouragement to become." The fellowship of encouragement is motivated by love; and love sees the possibilities of life which constitute hope.

It was love's discernment of the new relationship which Christ had made possible which moved Paul to send the fugitive slave Onesimus back to his master Philemon. This was done in hope--hope which Paul encouraged Philemon to fulfill. Therefore he exhorted Philemon to realize that brotherhood in Christ transcended every human distinction--even that between master and slave. In an ultimate effort to make the fellowship of encouragement effective Paul identified himself with both of them, saying unto Philemon, "I had much joy and comfort in thy love;" and saying of Onesimus, "Receive him as myself."<sup>1</sup>

There are, of course, many in our age who do not accept the fellowship of encouragement. Indeed, some advocate philosophies of life quite the contrary. Such would seem to be the view of the Spaniard, Jose Ortega y Gasset, who said,

The business then of each individual will be to live his own life, make his own history, pursue his own career, develop his own perspective--in short, fulfill himself.

Such statements only serve to make more evident the radical nature of the fellowship of encouragement as described by Paul. Note how his exhortation to the Philippians differs from that which we have just quoted:

If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the



having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind; doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind each counting other better than himself; not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others. Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...<sup>1</sup>

The contrast between these two views is readily evident. The irony of the first is that it is impossible. One can never "fulfill himself" through preoccupation with himself. This is perhaps a major reason many moderns live in despair. "Whoever would save his life shall lose it."<sup>2</sup> The second passage speaks not of self-fulfilment, but of the fellowship of self-giving. "Whoever shall lose his life for my sake," said Jesus, "shall find it." "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit."<sup>3</sup>

But there are also those who might well accept the fellowship of encouragement did they know of its existence. It is to be penitently confessed that the Church has not demonstrated this way of life in a very convincing fashion before the world. One cannot but wonder whether Unamuno would not have found an alternative to the "tragic sense of life" had the Church in Spain exhibited the true fellowship of encouragement. Would he have defined love as "resigned despair" had he known a fellowship in which love encouraged in hope?<sup>4</sup>

The Church is judged when it allows itself to become a parasite fastened upon society, or a gathering of passive auditors and spectators. It is judged because it fails as the fellowship of encouragement--and in that failure offers no true salvation to mankind. The Church is not a congregation of passive attendants, or pampered parishioners. Nor is it an institution concerned for political power and wealth whereby it may perpetuate itself.

The Church is a fellowship of giving-ones. It is here that its creative power is found--the power which can redeem men. So Barnabas, the "Son of Consolation," went to Tarsus to seek for Saul. Having found him he brought him into the wonderful fellowship of the Church in Antioch. From thence Paul commenced his great missionary endeavors. This act of Barnabas symbolizes for the whole Church the creative power of the fellowship of encouragement.

Modern man needs this encouragement as much as did ancient man.

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1. Phil. 2:1-5

2. Mt. 16:25

3. Jn. 12:24

4. The Tragic Sense of Life



Upon the recent death of President Kennedy one of his close associates spoke of Camus' assertion that life is absurd and utterly meaningless. "A Christian is not supposed to believe this," he said. "The world will eventually break your heart," he continued. "We just didn't think it would happen so soon."

A humble widow writes her former minister telling of the death of her only son--a cripple. "He didn't want to live," she said, "he was so miserable. It is hard to live without him. I will request your prayers and if possible come to see me."

Nor have our magnificent technological achievements immunized us from this need. The French scientist Lecomte du Nouy has said that man

cannot be expected at present to understand fully that the way in which he behaves, discharges his humblest or highest duties and solves his sentimental problems can make him either a co-worker with God or a dreg of evolution. He needs enlightenment, encouragement, advice, consolation, and hope.<sup>1</sup>

It is the task of the Church, the Community of Hope, to meet this need among all people, whether of high or low estate. The vital power of the fellowship of encouragement must be released within the Church. As we reclaim the hope, so will we renew the encouragement. Therefore, it is written,

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope that it waver not; for he is faithful that promised; and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; nor forsaking our own assembling together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh.<sup>2</sup>

Suffering, disillusionment, need, and tragedy are on every hand in the world. The crisis of life is found in the response men make to these experiences. Some rebel, others revolt in disgust, or are sickened with despair. Yet others in faith are encouraged to lay claim to hope.

It is because "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God," the Church, which is the Community of Hope, must never fail to provide the fellowship of encouragement. When the disciples from Rome met Paul as he was escorted in chains along the Appian Way, "he thanked God,

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1. Human Destiny, 256, 257

2. Heb. 10:23-25

3. Acts 28:15



and took courage." <sup>1</sup> May it be that the Church in our time will recover such fellowship!

### III THE FIRSTFRUITS OF FULFILMENT

As the Community of Hope, the Church is the firstfruits of fulfilment. Again let us note our text, but with different emphasis upon the words: "Hope putteth not to shame" or "does not disappoint us" (RSV), "because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts." Herein hope, which by nature concerns the future, receives present vindication in love.

The life of love is hope's fulfilment in the heart before hope is fulfilled in time. It is significant that whereas the ground of hope is historical and evidential, rooted in time and circumstance, the validity of hope is not made to rest alone in historical judgments.

The love of God which pervades the Christian community, bringing joy, consolation, and peace, is the foretaste of fulfilment whereby hope is confirmed. Indeed, can hope ask more than the victory of love? Therefore, as the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts hope finds assurance in daily experience while awaiting fulfilment in time.

Is it not then evident why schism and sectarianism within the Church have been so devastating to her hope? Is it not the more ironical that these schisms have often been characterized by judging those from whom we divide to be cut off from the hope? What strange perversion is it that would find hope assured by our alacrity in judgment rather than encouragement; and by our bent for proscription rather than for reconciliation? So parties which affirm hope by judging others are substituted for the fellowship of encouragement which confirms hope in loving others!

But since the love of God is not exclusive, and does not support exclusive hopes, men have sought other means whereby hope may be vindicated and made adequate to the challenge of modern life. Great rational and dogmatic systems have been created, and powerful institutions have been formed in efforts to provide some other assurance of hope than the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. These have failed miserably to speak to the distressed of the world. No intellectual system or political institution can bring to hope the living assurance which is found in the love of God shed abroad in our hearts.

Those of us who are willing to acquiesce in schism among men of like precious faith need to mark well that as love of the brotherhood wanes, so will our hope. We cannot negate in strife and partyism the present



foretaste of hope which is love, while confidently anticipating the future fulfilment of hope in time. We must understand anew that the "one hope of our calling" is a vital part of the "unity of the Spirit." The restoration of that one living hope to its rightful place in the Church should be as much a concern of our movement as any other Gift of God to His People.

Neither denominational mergers nor the appearance of "new brotherhoods" can fulfill the mission of the Church as the Community of Hope. There is but one Brotherhood of Christ in which the love of God is shed abroad. It is to this Brotherhood the promises of God are given; and it is the experience of this Brotherhood which is the foretaste of our hope.

Such a brotherhood is not comprised of institutions, or denominations, or parties, but of brothers. It recognizes none of the walls of partition which men are wont to build. Rather, it builds up itself in love <sup>1</sup> as it so speaks the truth. The most important concern in this Brotherhood of Christ is Christ's brother. Whoever he is, whatever may be his need, he is the object of affection. In this fellowship of encouragement life is given unto life with the result that each in a true sense shares in the life of all. So each becomes to the other a "treasure in heaven," a person in whom their lives are fulfilled. So Paul spoke to the Thessalonians:

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy. <sup>2</sup>

Let us then seek to restore to the Church her rightful identity as the Community of Hope. Let us so be indwelt by the love of God that we will gratefully give ourselves to the fellowship of encouragement.

Thus may we truly say to our brother, "When the Lord comes, you will be my hope, my joy, and my glory."

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1. Eph. 4:16

2. 1 Thess. 2:19,20



## CHRIST'S SECOND COMING, THE FULFILMENT OF HOPE

"Christ Our Hope" has been the theme of these lectures. Our study commenced with a consideration of "Christ, the Ground of Hope." We then considered "Christ in us, the Life of Hope." This afternoon our theme was, "Christ's Church, the Community of Hope." Tonight, our thoughts concern "Christ's Second Coming, the Fulfilment of Hope."

In the course of our thinking on these great themes it has become obvious that this life possesses such potential it cannot be contained within our present existence. For this reason many who see no hope beyond the grave are overwhelmed by bitterness and view life as a mockery. But those who have hope that life will unfold in an existence represented in the resurrection of Christ find "joy and peace in believing."

The Return of the Lord partakes of the same nature as His Resurrection. For this reason, the Resurrection, which is the Ground of Hope, and the Return, which is the Fulfilment of Hope, belong together. Although these mysteries are conveyed in human language which is at best a limited vehicle, they are to be taken seriously by all who ponder the meaning of life. The Resurrection revealed an existence beyond our own, not subject to death. The Return of Christ is the realization of that which the Resurrection revealed. Through it the hope of resurrection expressed in our baptism will be fulfilled.

### I THE EVENT OF CHRIST'S COMING

The Second Coming of Christ is an Event Declared. It is a prophetic event, to be sure, but nonetheless an event. It is, moreover, an event declared by Jesus on a number of significant occasions. The contexts within which Jesus spoke were as significant for the doctrine of His Second Coming as the words which he spoke. Let us notice several of the more important of these occasions.

Jesus first declared His return when discipleship was offered. Matthew records for us that significant occasion when Jesus withdrew into Caesarea-Philippi with the twelve. There Peter confessed Him to be the Messiah, and Jesus foretold the coming of the Church. Immediately thereafter He spoke of the cross, upon which Peter vigorously objected. Jesus rebuked Peter, declaring that not only did Messiah have a cross, but that all who would follow Him must accept crosses of their own.



It is significant that it was within this context of the Confession, the Church, and the Cross, Jesus foretold His Coming. His words were clear:

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. (Mt. 16:24-27)

A second occasion upon which Jesus declared His return was when false pride was manifested by the disciples. The twelve had accompanied the Master into the Temple. Beholding the majesty of that structure, they said unto Him, "Teacher, behold, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings!" Jesus replied, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another, which shall not be thrown down." (Mk. 13:1f; Lk. 21:5f). As they inquired what He meant, and when such a catastrophe should be, Jesus taught them further concerning His Second Advent.

It is noteworthy that at such a time, when disciples showed pride in the works of men's hands--pride in human achievement--Jesus declared His return. In effect they said, "Master, these magnificent stones will be here forever," implying by these words that human achievement was an adequate ground of human hope. By His radical reply Jesus called to their attention that hope is not to be founded in human achievement, but in divine power--the power of God revealed in the Second Advent.

A third occasion was found in Jesus' trial before the High Priest, when His Deity was affirmed. The High Priest said unto Him, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." (Mk. 14:61, 62). Men considered such a claim and prophecy blasphemous. It is significant, however, that in the shadow of the cross Jesus declared to those who presumed to judge Him that He would someday appear to judge them.

Again, when He gave the great commission unto the disciples, Christ affirmed His Second Coming. As the disciples gathered with Jesus for the last time they asked Him whether the Kingdom would now be "restored to Israel." To this question of deep concern Jesus replied, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye



shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Ac. 1:6-8). Having spoken these words Jesus was received up into heaven. While they were looking steadfastly after Him "two men stood by them in white apparel; who also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye looking into heaven? this Jesus, who was received up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye beheld him going into heaven." (Ac. 1:9-11).

Is it not significant that as this little company was sent into the world they were sent with the promise of their Lord's return reaffirmed by heavenly messengers! They could march with courage into the future, confident that He would be there.

So the Second Coming of Christ is an Event Declared under circumstances of great significance for all who hear His Word: When discipleship was offered, when false pride was manifested, when His deity was affirmed, and when the commission was given.

The Second Coming is also an Event Demonstrated. This is the significance of the transfiguration scene which, in the account of Matthew, follows immediately upon His promise to the disciples: "Verily, I say unto you, there are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Mt 16:28-17:1f).

This sequence of promise and performance is noteworthy, for it presents the transfiguration as a preview and foretaste of the Lord's return. The disciples on the mountaintop saw there a different Jesus than they had formerly beheld. Here was not the lowly Man of the Galilean road, but One glorious beyond all comprehension. The radiance of His face, and the glow of His very garments were almost indescribable.

Although they were well nigh overwhelmed by the experience, the meaning of the transfiguration was not lost upon the disciples. So Peter wrote in later years,

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there was borne such a voice to him by the Majestic Glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice we ourselves heard borne out of heaven, when we were with him in the holy mount. And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place. . . (II Pet. 1:16-19).



The consummation of the Christian hope is therefore not rooted in wishful thinking, but in demonstration and power. The transfiguration makes the word of prophecy "more sure," providing a foretaste of the Lord's return. Christ's coming is therefore not only an Event Declared, but an Event Demonstrated.

In the third place, the Second Coming of Christ is an Event Demanded. It is an event demanded for the completion of His work. Hear Peter's address to the multitude on Solomon's Porch, when he said,

Repent ye therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that so there may come seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and that he may send the Christ who hath been appointed for you, even Jesus: whom the heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, whereof God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets that have been from of old. (Ac 3:19-21).

In this exhortation the apostle casts the vision of the future into this wonderful, intriguing act of God called "the restoration of all things," whereby God's word of redemption is fulfilled. By the transforming power of the Lord's return the whole creation which "groans in travail" will experience the "glorious liberty of the children of God."

But the Second Coming of Christ is also an Event Demanded as intervention in crisis. Today it is popular to debate whether the world is getting "worse and worse," or "better and better." This seems to me an inconsequential debate; for man's capacity for good and his capacity for evil have both increased remarkably in our generation. It is as though we lived upon a razor's edge, and that each decision and choice of mankind has far greater consequences than ever before.

As through our science and technology man's power for good has been increased, so has his power for evil. The cosmic struggle is sharpened with each advance in human knowledge and ability. "The mystery of iniquity" and the "mystery of godliness" will continue their mortal struggle until the "mystery of iniquity" which is "already at work" presents its masterpiece in the "lawless one" whom the Lord Jesus shall "bring to nought by the manifestation of his comin." (II Thess. 2:7f).

Thus we are taught that Christ will return to intervene in mankind's ultimate crisis. As such His Second Coming is an Event Demanded.

The Coming of Christ is also an Event Demanded for the perfection of communion. Our communion in the loaf and cup are only "until He comes." When He appears a fellowship yet more real is promised the Church. As the



young Hebrew bridegroom would go with his friends to the home of his betrothed, there to receive her and take her into his own home, so Christ will come for His Church and usher her into that perfect communion called the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb."

The Church communes, therefore, in anticipation of communion. In the Lord's Supper the community of faith looks backward and forward. As the redemption they commemorate necessitated His First Advent, so the redemption they anticipate necessitates His Second Appearing.

Thus the Second Coming of Christ is an Event Declared, Demonstrated, and Demanded.

## II THE MANNER OF CHRIST'S COMING

Let us now consider the Manner of Christ's Coming. That this great theme has at times been subject to speculative abuse ought not to prejudice us against the subject itself. What does the Bible say concerning the manner of His return?

The Second Coming of Christ will be sudden. Numerous passages of scripture testify to the imminence of Christ's return. Jesus Himself warned on more than one occasion that no man would know "the day or the hour." To the inquiring disciples on the mount of ascension He said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority." (Ac. 1:7). And at the close of one of the great prophetic discourses recorded by Matthew He said,

Watch therefore: for ye know not on what day your Lord cometh. But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore be ye also ready; for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Mt. 24:42-44).

Those who would place the coming of the Lord in some far distant future are in effect saying, "He will not come today." No man has the authority to say this. On the other hand, those who specify a date in some immediate present are also in error, for no man knows the day or the hour. The sense of imminence or suddenness is a vital part of the Biblical doctrine of the Second Advent.

There are some, however, who have lost confidence in the "Blessed Hope" because it has been so long promised, yet unfulfilled. But this attitude was present even in apostolic days, expressed by those who said, "Where is the promise of His coming?" To such ones Peter said,



Forget not this one thing, beloved, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is long suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (II Peter 3:8,9)

In an age of magnificent astronomical and geological discovery, when time is described in aeons, and distance in terms of light years, how foolish it is for us to place a nineteen hundred year limit of time upon God! How foolish to say that if Christ has not come in these few centuries, the hope of His coming is vain!

God is not subject to our categories of time and space. Therefore the Second Coming of His Son will of necessity be sudden and imminent. Therefore it behoves the believer simply to confess that "the Lord is at hand."

For the unbelieving world, so sudden will be Christ's return that He will find life going on as usual. Jesus compared it to other times of crisis when he said,

As it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded... After the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of man is revealed... In that night there shall be two men on one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. There shall be two women grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. (Lk. 17:26f)

There are those in our day who say the expectation of the early Church that Christ would come in their generation was ill founded. This is not true. The early Church lived, as all disciples should live, in the awareness of His imminence. It may be true that some early Christian made wrong deductions from the teaching, but the teaching remains nonetheless a vital part of the Christian world-view.

It is not for us to say that they were wrong in affirming, "We shall not all sleep." Rather, it is for us to confess our own participation in the community of hope which affirms in every generation, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." (I Cor. 15:51). The crown of life is promised to all those who "love His appearing." (II Tim. 4:8).



In the second place, the manner of Christ's Return is Personal and visible. The word parousia means "bodily presence." So we read, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven"--not just the Lord's influence. The angels' promise to the commissioned disciples was that Jesus would "so come in like manner" as they had beheld Him going into heaven. (Ac 1:11).

Jesus Himself said that in his parousia the whole troubled world would behold Him. (Lk 21:27). He will truly be inevitable then; so inevitable that Jesus said it would be a time when men would vainly seek death to avoid Him. In the Revelation of John it is said they would "cry for the rocks and the mountains" to hide them from the face of the Lamb.

But if His Coming will be personal and visible, it will surely be glorious. It will be glorious in the saints who accompany Him. What a procession that will be! The redeemed of all the ages coming with the Saviour-King! (1 Thess. 3:13).

There will also be the glory of the angels. These heavenly servants will receive their highest mission when they are sent forth with "a great sound of a trumpet," and gather together the King's awaiting elect. (Mt. 24:31).

But the greatest glory will be that of the Son of Man Himself, appearing no more as the lowly Man of Galilee, but as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. The prayer He offered in the upper room will be answered--that prayer in which he said, "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (Jn. 17:24).

Thus, the manner of Christ's Second Coming shall be sudden, personal and visible, inevitable, and full of glory!

### III THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S COMING

What is the meaning of the Second Advent? It means, first of all, the Judgment of Man's World. In spite of the devastation of two world wars our generation is surfeited with pride. The longing of human hearts is suppressed by gadgetry. Technology is become our new God and Saviour.

So we build our modern towers of Babel, and offer them as new ways to heaven. Like Nebuchadnezzar of old we build our civilizations and say, "Is not this great Babylon that I have built!"

The Lord will judge such a world. There will not be left one stone upon another. There is indeed a "Kingdom which cannot be shaken," but it is not the kingdom man builds. "Wherefore," we are exhorted, "judge nothing before



the time, until the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise from God." (I Cor. 4:5f). The Second Coming of Christ means the judgment of man's way.

But the Parousia also means the Fulfilment of God's Providence. By His coming, the last enemy, Death, is brought to nought. In contemplation of the triumph of life in holiness, Paul bursts forth in praise, singing,

O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? The sting of death is sin; and the power of sin is the law: but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Cor. 15:55).

As a result of the conquest of sin and death there will come the wonderful, mysterious transformation of nature foretold by the prophets. We may not be able fully to comprehend the meaning of this "restoration of all things," but how thrilling is it to ponder this mystery!

It may be recalled that in our first lecture we pointed to the fact that God had subjected the creation to vanity because of human sin. In the primeval age recorded by Genesis one reads the curse pronounced upon the ground for man's sake. Henceforth, it was to bring forth thorns and thistles, and man would earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. This simple figure represents a cosmic tragedy. Something truly did happen to God's creation when man sinned. This we noted was the meaning of human despair.

But the Scripture also foretells the redemption of the creation. In his Letter to the Romans Paul says,

I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. (Rom. 8:18f).

This wonderful transformation is described in the vision of John, who writes,

I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying,



Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God: and he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain, any more: the first things are passed away. And he that sitteth on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. (Rev. 21:1-5).

This was one of the favorite themes of Alexander Campbell. One of the last essays he wrote for the Millennial Harbinger was on the text, "Behold, I make all things new."

With such a hope in view, Peter says to men of every generation,

Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and earnestly desiring the coming of the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. (II Pet. 3:11-13).

So Christ's Second Coming means the fulfilment of God's Providence in the restoration of the creation. I believe that the Restoration Movement should place its mission within this larger, cosmic context. We should seek to be a part of the restoration of God's creation unto Himself, with the result that God may be "everything to everyone."

The Second Coming of Christ also means the Vindication of Christ's Way. It is folly to suppose that the tragedy, rebellion, and strife which we see in this present world is the ultimate for mankind. The Lord reigns! Hear the Second Psalm:

Why do the nations rage,  
And the peoples meditate a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against Jehovah, and against his anointed, saying,  
Let us break their bonds asunder,  
And cast away their cords from us.  
He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh:  
The Lord will have them in derision.  
Then will he speak unto them in his wrath,  
And vex them in his sore displeasure:  
Yet I have set my king  
Upon my holy hill of Zion.



I will tell of the decree:  
 Jehovah said unto me, Thou art my son;  
 This day have I begotten thee,  
 Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance,  
 And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.  
 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron;  
 Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

So it is that Christ's coming means the vindication of His way. In the words of the heavenly anthem, "The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever." (Rev 11:15). "In the name of Jesus every knee should bow. . . and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Phil. 2:10, 11).

Or, hear the words of the "Song of the Lamb:"

Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty: righteous and true are they ways, thou King of the ages. Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest. (Rev. 15:3, 4).

## CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ is the Ground of Hope. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1 Pet. 1:3).

Jesus Christ is the Life of Hope. "Christ in you" is "the hope of glory." (Col. 1:27).

Christ's Church is the Community of Hope. "Hope putteth not to shame; because the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which was given unto us." (Rom 5:5).

The Second Coming of Christ is the Fulfilment of Hope. "And the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:23).

Let us then give heed to the word which says,

Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for these things, give diligence that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless



in his sight. . . Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen. (II Pet. 3:14f).

Christ is our Hope!



## RESTORATION AND RESTRUCTURE

Robert O. Fife

(An informal address delivered at the Ministers' Breakfast, T. H. Johnson Memorial Lectures, Manhattan Bible College, 1964.)

### Introduction

The words "restoration" and "restructure", and the conceptions which they represent, are of vital concern to the religious movement of which we are a part. Perhaps more than any other words these represent the crucial issues which presently confront us. The manner in which we relate the concerns which restoration and restructure represent will in large measure determine our future as a people.

The contemporary religious scene of which we are a part makes the subjects of restoration and restructure exceedingly significant. Since the beginning of our movement in the early part of the nineteenth century great events have taken place within the religious world. One of these is the advent of the Ecumenical Movement. While it is true that Alexander Campbell and others who were associated with him were intensely interested in the old Evangelical Alliance, certainly the advent of the Ecumenical Movement has brought new dimensions to our existence as a people. The studies on Faith and Order, and Life and Work are of great significance to our mission.

While there may be considerable debate concerning the conciliar conception of unity which is presently emphasized by the leaders of the Ecumenical Movement, the concern for unity which has given rise to such world-wide conversation is almost universally acclaimed. No longer do many voices defend the sectarianism with which our fathers had to contend. Certainly this opening of channels of communication is a significant factor to which the Restoration Movement in our day must relate itself in some effective fashion.

In addition to the rise of the Ecumenical Movement, other changes such as the growing complexity of society, the "shrinking" of the world, and the challenge of "neo-paganism" have made it necessary that we rethink our own mission and message as a movement within the Church.

In response to these developments within the world, we well as within the Church, a great fermentation has appeared within our fellowship. On the one



hand, significant trends are represented in such institutions as the Commission on Restructure, the work of the Panel of Scholars (which was appointed by the Board of Higher Education, the United Christian Missionary Society, and the Christian Board of Publication), and in the writings of individuals such as Dr. Loren Lair. Many significant papers which have been presented to the meetings of the Commission on Restructure have been published in Mid-Stream, the journal of the Council on Christian Unity. There are also important resolutions passed by the International Convention in its last several assemblies, as well as statements by related agencies, such as the pamphlet distributed by the Commission on Cooperative Policy and Practice, entitled, "What Brotherhood Cooperation Means".

In much of the foregoing writing there is a tendency to define brotherhood in structural or economic terms. The International Convention is become in the minds of many the exclusive structure whereby this fellowship is to be defined. In words oft repeated, it is to become "the whole Church, as far as our brotherhood is concerned".

There are, moreover, two fundamental viewpoints represented concerning the future destiny of our people. The one is that we are destined to become a "disappearing brotherhood" through union with other denominations. The other view is that we still have a mission to fulfill as a people.

On the other hand, outside this general structural development centering within the International Convention, there has been a great proliferation of missionary, educational, and benevolent institutions. These have arisen largely through the voluntary labors of concerned individuals, and not always with any particular reference to one another. The agencies and institutions so created have in the latter years come to center their communication in such gatherings as the National Christian Education Convention, the National Christian Missionary Convention, and in the fellowship afforded in the North American Christian Convention.

There has also been a tendency among some who participate in this general sphere of activity to define brotherhood in structural terms. Note for instance those demonstrations of an "appearing brotherhood" which are actually demonstrations of various agency or missionary endeavors.

Within this portion of the movement there has also developed a further emphasis upon "restoration" interpreted in terms of "patternism". In this view, the chief task of the movement is simply to recreate certain structural forms of the Church described in the New Testament with little reference to spiritual purpose or function. Some seem to believe that these structures in themselves constitute the "church restored".

There are of course higher and nobler conceptions of restoration held by many in this portion of the fellowship, but these conceptions have not always been adequately communicated.



As a result of these trends there has been a growing tendency toward polarization within the movement--a polarization represented on the one hand by the drive toward restructure, and on the other hand by the concern for restoration as "patternism". This polarization does not reflect the fellowship of faith which originally brought us into being, but rather reflects an abandonment of that ideal. Many of those who are interested in restructure have readily confessed the abandonment of the ideal, while many of those who advocate restoration as "patternism" have abandoned the ideal without realizing it.

There remains, however, a large portion of our fellowship which still thinks of its unity as being constituted in our one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. But this great body of people of "like precious faith" are confronted by the necessity of reaffirming their fellowship in Christ. Otherwise, those who hold to the extreme views represented by these polarizing influences, and who define the fellowship in those terms, may well determine the course of our history although they are relative minorities among us.

For this reason it is important that we should think together concerning "Restoration and Restructure". That these terms have become increasingly emotive lays upon us the more serious obligation to seek an objective, just, and constructive understanding of what they mean, how they may relate to one another, and how we may relate ourselves to them in faith.

## 1. RESTORATION

The word "restoration" is susceptible of numerous definitions. As its root meaning, it may signify "to give back", "to place again in a former position", "to recover", or "to remove certain debris". The Commission on Restructure has defined restoration as "the act of returning an object to its previous (original) condition".

Placed within the more immediate context of our identity as a people, I would define "restoration" as "The attempt to recover for the Church those characteristics discerned in the New Testament to have been created by the Gospel, and for the Gospel; in order to present to the Living Lord a Body adequately suited to His ministry in this age".

Let us now consider the possibility of restoration.

There are of course those who believe that the task of restoration has been accomplished. It has been accomplished in their own particular congregational or corporate life. Interestingly enough, this confidence is sometimes confirmed by separatism in which those who lay equal claim to having accomplished the task consider one another heretical because they have not "restored" the same things! It should be obvious that restoration is not complete until the unity of the Church has been restored.



Again, there are those who conceive restoration as a continuing task of the Church. These see that restoration is a part of the living reformation of the Church as it constantly interprets itself in the light of its origins. Such ones view discipleship as a learning and growing process, and should see restoration as a part of the discipline of discipleship.

There are also those who consider restoration to be "bankrupt". This view is one of the major theses of certain members of the Panel of Scholars. Such bankruptcy is considered to rest upon one of several grounds.

On one hand are those who believe that the New Testament does not portray an order which is viable in our day. It is believed by some of these that the principle of expediency is the sole principle which governed the organization of the Church in the apostolic age, and that expediency ought to be the sole principle which governs the organization of the Church in our day.

Others view the principle of restoration to be bankrupt on the grounds of "historical relativity". These would say that it is simply impossible to restore anything, historically speaking. This latter criticism of course strikes not only at the heart of any effort toward restoration, but also at the root of all Biblical reformation. It tends to set the Church adrift in a changing world as one of the changing institutions within the world.

Now it is obvious that we are not to assume that it is possible to restore that which is purely cultural in the Church of the New Testament. This was not the aim of our movement in the beginning. One would search in vain for such an idea in the Declaration and Address, or in the Christian System.

At the same time, however, we must take care that we do not absolutize change. It is all too easy to repudiate dogma in the name of the dogma of historical relativism. Certainly there is that in the Church which is subject to change as man's way of life changes; but we believe that there is also that in the Church which is given once for all. Else how can we speak of the Church?

While it is true that our world is quite different from that of the first century, man in his uniquely human situation is essentially unchanged. He faces the same life problems as did man of the first century. And the Gospel which is addressed to that life need therefore remains unchanged because it is rooted in great redemptive acts which were intended to redeem man from that need.

For this reason, the order which exhibits that Gospel is given, and is universally valid for all time. It remains for us to discover it, to treasure it, or if it has been in any sense obscured or lost, to restore it. The principle of restoration is that the Church must constantly submit herself to the judgment of her origins recorded in the New Testament in order to the retention of her identity, and the renewal of her unity.



While the tradition and history of the Church are not significant, her origins are definitive. The possibility of restoration is therefore germane to the very possibility of the Church being and remaining the Church.

What of the desirability of restoration? There are those who are well represented among the Panel of Scholars who no longer consider restoration to be desirable. Among these are some who say that restoration implies "discontinuity" with the historical Church. In this view, "restoration" involves an impossible "leap backward" over the centuries, disregarding the continuing tradition of the Church. It is considered to be a useless effort to conform the Church of the twentieth century to that of the first century.

There are also some who consider restoration no longer desirable because they believe that whatever structure or order may be discerned in the New Testament was purely the product of expediency. Therefore, instead of attempting to restore or recover what was expedient in that age, we should simply act upon the basis of the same principle, creating what is expedient in our age. This should be done irrespective of whether that which we consider expedient in our day conforms to that which was thought wise in the first century.

I must note at this point that here there is not a clear distinction between order and structure. Of this we shall speak later.

Again, there are those who affirm that the New Testament does not reflect the connectionalism which it is believed the Church in modern America must have in order to make itself relevant to American life. It is therefore thought useless to attempt to restore a structure which is doomed inadequate to the exigencies of modern life.

In sum, these views would indicate that it is neither desirable nor possible to restore the first century Church in the twentieth century world.

Among those who consider restoration to be desirable there are two major groups: On one hand are some who would seem to believe that restoration is an end in itself. These would imitate certain patterns discerned in the New Testament without reference to their spiritual purpose. This is somewhat akin to the Japanese imitation of the American printing press which very dutifully showed stamped upon the machine, "Made in Philadelphia".

On the other hand are those who consider restoration to be most desirable as a means to an end. This, in my judgement, is much more in keeping with the vision found in the Declaration and Address, wherein the purpose of restoration is declared to be unto the unity of the Church, unto the evangelization of the world.



Among these who believe restoration to be a means to an end, there remains the emphasis upon the word "movement". The word "movement" is used to indicate progress toward the ends of restoration. As such, they view the Restoration Movement as an association for witness within the Church, unto the unity of the Church.

At this point it is well to note that there is a certain degree of semantic confusion among us, and in some sense much of the debate may be a war over words. The emphasis by some upon the word "renewal" is very much akin to the emphasis which others would make in the word "restoration". Obviously, restoration as patternism is not the same as renewal, any more than restructure is the same as renewal.

On the other hand, that view of restoration which relates to a spiritual end is much akin to the definitions of renewal which relate to the refreshment of the Church.

It is also important at this point to call our attention to the significance of the word "movement". In our preoccupation with the subjects of restoration and restructure it is important that we not overlook the significance of the words "Restoration Movement".

Even the possibility of being a movement within the Church has been subject to challenge. And, significantly enough, it has been challenged on two hands: On one hand are those who view a movement as not viable within the American Church. It is said that we must be a denomination with appropriate denominational structures if we are to speak effectively to our culture. It would seem somewhat ironical, however, that many of those who say our movement status is not viable are yet devoted to the Ecumenical Movement.

On the other hand are those who, in their concern for the cause of restoration, have overlooked the significance of our identity as a movement. These forget that we are a movement within the Church, and have rather come to think of ourselves as being the whole Church. Many such therefore consider that those outside the movement are no part of the Church. Obviously then, even the conception of being a movement needs further definition and appreciation on our part. What is the relation between ourselves as a movement, and ourselves as Church?

I believe that the principle of being a movement for restoration within the Church possesses validity. We exist as a movement for witness within the Church, and we are obliged to retain our identity as long as that witness is needed by the Church. I am convinced that our failure to distinguish between ourselves as a movement and as Church is a major source of our difficulties. As a movement for restoration we are obliged to restore to the Church that which we have come to see concerning the Lord's Supper. But the Lord's Supper does not belong to the Restoration Movement. It is the Church which breaks the bread and drinks the cup.



It is likewise the task of the Restoration Movement to witness to Biblical baptism. But we are not baptized into the Restoration Movement. Rather, we are baptized into Christ and His Church. I am convinced that much of our struggle over "open membership" is due to our failure properly to discern between our identity as movement and our identity as Church.

To be a movement for restoration places us under catholic obligations. We can only stand upon universal ground, and can only maintain fellowship upon that universal ground. A denomination is not under such catholic obligations. It may consistently found its life upon that which is partial, and define the fellowship by structures which are admittedly not catholic. This is perhaps a major reason why many of those who are committed to the formation of a clearly defined, self-contained, structured "brotherhood" are willing, and even anxious to accept denominational status. A movement for witness within the Church dare not establish structures which impede fellowship within the Church. But a denomination is under no such hindrance, for it is by definition partial and self-contained.

For this reason I believe we must reaffirm the validity of the principle of a movement both toward those who have forgotten that we are a movement and therefore not the whole Church, and those who would forsake our movement status and assume denominational structures which can never hope to be the whole Church. I would prefer to stand with those who acknowledge that we are a movement within the Church -- a movement for witness to restoration in order to the unity of the Church.

## II. RESTRUCTURE

Let us now turn to the subject of "Restructure". Three definitions of "restructure" are given by the Commission on Restructure in Mid-Stream. They are as follows:

1. Expedient re-arrangement of parts without essentially changing the dominating whole.
2. A re-arrangement of parts necessitated by a change in the essential character of the dominating whole.
3. A re-arrangement of parts necessitated by the achievement of a more accurate understanding of the character of the whole.

Dr. James A. Moak, General Secretary of the Kentucky Association of Christian Churches, defined the purpose of restructure in a recent issue of The Christian as being "to achieve a more adequate organizational expression of the wholeness of the church."

Each of these definitions reflects a body of opinion among us as to the nature and purpose of restructure. The statement of purpose given by Dr. Moak



raises a number of very significant questions which involve both the possibility of such an "organizational expression of the wholeness of the church", and the form which it might take.

The definitions given by the Commission vary as to whether the "re-arrangement of parts" is expedient or necessary; and whether the "dominating whole" is thereby changed, or not. I presume that by "parts" the Commission means congregations, agencies, conventions; while by "the dominating whole" is meant the International Convention. Which, if any, of these conceptions will "carry the day" and become the principle by which "the brotherhood" is to be "restructured" is yet to be seen. Certainly the implications of these definitions and conceptions need to be studied by all of us if we are to understand our present situation.

The purpose of restructure has been stated to be a "more adequate organizational expression of the wholeness of the church." But what does this mean? To some it would seem to indicate the conscious formation of denominational structures in order that union with other denominations may be facilitated. To others it would seem to mean simple reorganization in the interest of efficiency, without intention of losing our identity within a larger denominational body. In the introduction to his recent book, The Christian Churches and their Work, Dr. Lair clearly states these differing viewpoints. Certainly their significance cannot be overemphasized as one considers our future as a people.

The ideological formulations of restructure which are being developed reflect the purposes which are sought. Among these, three merit special attention:

#### 1. "Unification."

"Unification" is the term used to describe the view advocated by Lair, George Earle Owen, and a number of others. This involves the establishment of a congregational connectionalism through delegate conventions at all levels -- district, state, and national. The relative responsibilities and prerogatives of each level of connectional life would be clearly defined on the general principle that each level of structure should have the authority to carry out the functions which pertain to it.

In this view all agencies would be granted "churchly status" within the appropriate levels, ceasing thereby to be voluntary agencies. This would of course necessitate numerous constitutional changes both on the part of conventions and agencies. While the agencies would thereby come to have structural responsibility to fulfill the will of the churches expressed in the dicta of conventions, they would at the same time receive universal support in that no "duplicative" or "competitive" agencies would be allowed within the structure, or within "the church".



In order to avoid such duplication, voluntarism in agency life is to be eschewed. While it is freely granted by those who advocate "unification" that this is a major change in our tradition, wherein concerned individuals were free to associate themselves together for missionary, benevolent, or educational purposes without hindering the fellowship, such voluntarism is to be no longer acceptable.

Dr. Lair has constructed an apology for this position based upon the assertion that Alexander Campbell originally intended the national convention of 1849 to be a convention of delegates duly appointed and instructed by congregations. Lair is of the opinion that the mass meeting type of convention is not Campbellian. Certainly his analysis of the material found in such periodicals as the Harbinger merits careful study by us all.

In such a system "democracy" is a key word, although it would seem that the structure envisioned would be more republican or representative than "democratic". In this connection it is of interest to note how our American political institutions reflect upon our thinking of the Church.

Actually, it seems to me entirely possible that a "democratic" procedure may not of itself reflect the nature of the Church. Certainly we are obliged to see that a democratic majority will express the intelligent, devotional consensus of the faithful under the judgement of the Word. Otherwise, the most "democratic" procedures may not reflect the nature of the Church at all.

Those who advocate the principle of "unification" would find its focal point in the International Convention, which is "the whole church as far as our brotherhood is concerned". This phrase is used with increasing frequency and is most significant, both in the light of the refusal of the International Convention to admit certain agencies which have petitioned for admittance, and in the light of the existence of Churches of Christ in other countries which do not participate in the International Convention. Are these brethren in Christ no longer to be considered members of "the brotherhood"?

The national significance of this structure is therefore worthy of note. Indeed, in his early paper advocating restructure, Willard Wickizer indicated that care must be taken lest the state "churches" become "denominations" without reference to some common center on a national level such as the International Convention.

The principle of "unification" is therefore one of the major concepts which may well influence the course of "Brotherhood Restructure". Further implications of this view will be noted later.

2. A second philosophy of restructure which we would note is that propounded by Dean W. B. Blakemore in his theory of the creation of authority



by the act of association. Blakemore believes congregationalism to be "bankrupt". In his quest for a principle of order to fill the void left by the demise of our traditional polity he would advocate neither episcopal nor presbyterian systems. Rather, he has formulated the theory of authority created by act of association. In his words, "It is in the act of association for the fulfillment of a function that new powers, abilities, responsibilities, and authority are created." ("The Issue of Polity for Disciples Today", in The Revival of the Churches, 71) In Dean Blakemore's view, this is "a very lively and precious concept".

Briefly stated, the theory is as follows:

a. An act of association for purpose creates power relevant to that purpose, whether on the local, state, national, or other levels.

b. Power creates right. In a paper read before the Commission on Re-structure in 1962 Dean Blakemore developed this thesis with special reference to Dr. Virgil Sly's decision to enable certain missionary endeavors to work with the United Churches irrespective of the majority opinion at home. "It is efficacy that creates authority," says Dean Blakemore. "If in the course of our development an institution emerges which has the ability to do a particular task that institution has the right to do it." (See Mid-Stream, Vol. II, no. 2, pp. 74, 75.)

c. Delegates constitute the body to which they are delegated, and their primary responsibility is not to the bodies which delegated them, but to the body which they constitute.

I believe that I have correctly stated the essential factors in Dr. Blakemore's theory. It remains for us to make a few remarks concerning these propositions.

- a. In a Kingdom whose Christ is Lord, to what extent, or in what fashion can we properly speak of creating power?
- b. What is the relationship between His authority and the power we "create"?
- c. How does the assertion that the "ability" to do a thing grants the "right" to do it differ from that thesis which has been so destructive of human freedom and justice that "macht" makes "recht"?
- d. What are the implications for the Church of the assertion that a delegate's primary responsibility is to the association to which he is delegated, and not to the body which delegated him? Is a delegating body such as a congregation to have no right of ratification?



- e. If an association such as an educational institution or missionary society, or even a convention, can only function as it is supported by worshiping congregations, to what extent can it claim that its powers originate with itself? It would seem that this could only be true when the support of such an association is part of the act of association. Consequently, when that support fails it constitutes dissociation, and resultant loss of authority.

It would certainly seem that Dean Blakemore's theory merits careful study, but from this present vantage point it would appear to be a theory fraught with considerable danger for all who treasure freedom within the fellowship of faith.

3. Another noteworthy philosophy of restructure is that presented by Dean Ronald Osborn in his paper entitled, "A theology of Denominations and Principles for Brotherhood Restructure." Dean Osborn frankly takes the position the fellowship must be structured in order that the Church might adequately fulfill its mission within our culture. At the same time, it is acknowledged that no structure is universal. Therefore, since structure is at best partial we must accept denominational status, for a denomination is admittedly partial, and content to be so.

Granted Dr. Osborn's presupposition this would seem to be a perfectly logical sequence. Of course those of us who believe that fellowship may be expressed, but not defined by structure are not so ready to acquiesce in the inevitability of the denominational pattern for our time.

In Osborn's view, the task of restructure is to form channels of action, communication, and authority among the several parts of the brotherhood which will become definitive of our identity. Because these channels cannot by their very nature be universal in the Church (obviously the whole Church is not contained within the International Convention) the fellowship which is defined by them can only be partial. Therefore we must accept frankly a denominational status.

Having thus assumed denominational form we would then be prepared through appropriate delegations to participate in the modern conciliar movement, which is in this view the best, and perhaps only way to Christian unity. Such participation may quite possibly involve participation in denominational mergers of one sort or another. Of course having done all this it is questioned by some whether the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church would be any nearer of realization. The contemporary debate whether the World Council of Churches is to assume churchly status is here very instructive.

It would seem somewhat ironical to me that having rejected "restorationism" because it degenerated into "patternism" we should come to seek the renewal of the Church in terms of "structuralism". Surely these are not the only alternatives



we have!

Such are three major philosophies which bear upon the problem of restructure. I believe they represent creative efforts toward solution of our problems which certainly merit careful study by us all. At the same time, however, it is to be questioned whether either of them presents a unity more real and vital than that which we have had in our one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and in our common participation in the one loaf. It is to be hoped that the opportunities for dialogue will be enlarged both with reference to these concepts and those held by others.

### III. RESTORATION AND RESTRUCTURE

Let us now attempt to relate Restoration and Restructure as our assigned task requires. There are certain points of impingement between these two conceptions which merit our attention.

1. Restoration implies a Given in the Church which is universally valid. This I would define as the Gospel, and the order which embodies the Gospel. What is to be the relation of this Given to the expedients of restructure? Will the expedients judge the Given, or will the Given judge the expedients?

Indeed, it must be asked, What is the relation between structure and order? If they are identical the one cannot be expedient and the other Given. If they are different, how does their difference relate to our fellowship in Christ? Dare we so structure the fellowship as to exclude some who accept the Given? It would seem remarkable that in our preoccupation with structure we have said so little of order. We dare not ignore this problem any longer.

2. Restoration and Restructure certainly involve the place of the worshipping congregation in the Church. Throughout much that has been written there runs a very common refrain that our congregational way of life is the product of the American frontier, and is unfit for modern life. Frederick Jackson Turner might well have been pleased to find so many theologians following his "frontier thesis"! But surely there were worshipping congregations before the advent of the American frontier!

It would seem obvious that the worshipping congregations reflected in the New Testament were the essence of the Church. It is not, however, clear what structural relations may have existed between these congregations during this "creative period" in the history of the Church. It seems evident that they cooperated together in various endeavors, and were, as Alexander Campbell noted, "districted" into groups such as the "churches of Macedonia".

But what connexional relationship existed among these congregations? Some believe that the Jerusalem Council implies a conciliar relationship.



Others profess to find no connectional relationship at all. Of these latter, some would leave the Church without such connectional relationships, while others would in the name of expedience create such relationships.

In the event that such a relationship is to be created among congregations, what shall be its nature? Shall it be considered "inter-congregational" or "super-congregational"? What shall be the significance of such a structure for the question of "congregational autonomy"?

Now I am of the opinion that we must more carefully define what is meant by "congregational autonomy". I do not believe that any congregation is a law unto itself. It exists under the authority of Christ as expressed in the scripture, and in a fellowship with other congregations and the Church at large which involves significant responsibilities. It would seem to me that only in this sense may we speak of "congregational autonomy".

At the same time, however, it needs to be noted that the question of "congregational autonomy" is more than a political question. We may debate from now until doomsday whether the authority of Christ over the Church moves from the "bottom up", from the "top down", or into several "drawers" at once. This is beside the point.

The point is that the worshiping congregation is the focus of creativity within the Church. We may arrange and structure to our hearts' content, but the worshiping congregation still remains the "Event", as Barth put it, in which the Church is continually renewed. It is to be remembered that Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." No structure is creative of itself. It is only viable as it enhances the congregation of Christ with His people.

3. In some of the discussions of Restoration or Restructure there has been debate over whether the congregation or the individual is the "basic unit" of the Church. It seems to me that this is an unprofitable discussion in that the alternatives which are presented are in themselves untenable. Obviously a congregation is composed of individuals who, in this sense, are the "basic units" of the Church. But it is to be remembered that they are more than individuals -- they are members -- members of Christ and of His congregation. One is not a member in himself alone, but as a part of a whole. In this sense the "basic unit" may be the congregation, or in a yet further dimension the "basic unit" is the whole Church.

It would seem to me, therefore, that any realistic and Biblical polity must provide for both these individual and social dimensions. One thing is certain, however, structures or patterns do not of themselves constitute the Church. It is people -- people in relationship -- who constitute the Church.



Faith, hope, and love are the only principles upon which such a polity can exist, for they are the only principles which are conducive both to human freedom and social order. Yet, among the many considerations before us as a people how remarkable is the absence of any great affirmations of common faith, hope, and love!

4. While it is to be granted that the efficient use of means is a part of faithful stewardship (as Dr. Lair has maintained), the extent to which voluntarism is to be excluded in the name of efficiency is open to serious question. Is there no longer to be room within the fellowship for a Philip who has a concern for Samaria?

I believe there is true value in retaining within a polity room for voluntary action in response to concerns which may create various enterprises -- enterprises which have their common source in the fellowship of faith. According to our tradition such agencies have been related to the Church in the persons of those believers who formed them, but they have not of themselves been considered "church". Therefore, participation or non-participation in them has not defined fellowship in the Church.

The situation will be quite different, however, if the following fusion of events should take place in the process of Restructure:

- a. Investing "approved agencies" with "churchly status" whereby agency support becomes a criterion of church membership.
- b. Excluding from the structure all "duplicative" or "competitive" concerns in the name of efficiency. In effect, this declares them to be "no church", since only the "approved agencies" are "churchly".
- c. Defining fellowship in terms of the structure so created. (This is the tendency of the recent pamphlet issued by the Commission on Cooperative Policy and Practice entitled, "What Brotherhood Cooperation Means".)

Should such a fusion take place it would seem apparent from the history of the Church that a succession of schisms may be expected to follow. If the sincere concerns of consecrated people are not allowed fulfilment within the "church", they will seek fulfilment outside the "church". Troeltsch may call such endeavors "sects", but I think it is the "church" which is sectarian at this point.

Francis of Assisi and Peter Waldo are instructive in this regard. While their concerns were similar, Francis found room within the Church, but Peter did not. However, this did not keep Peter Waldo from fulfilling his concern; and the Church was the poorer for having excluded him.



It is often said today that "we do not know where the Holy Spirit is leading us". Well, one thing is sure: The Holy Spirit will not lead us to form a structure which excludes from the fellowship a brother whose concern, although different from ours, gives evidence by its fruits of having been born of the same Holy Spirit.

The work of the Holy Spirit cannot be confined to a structure. Therefore, any structure which at all reflects His mind and work will be "open-ended". A "unification" which presents a rigid structure enforced by sanctions may well expect creative forces within the Church to find other channels or means of fulfilment. Dean England has warned against such a prospect in his paper before the Commission on Restructure.

Efficiency in united action is highly desirable, but it ought not to be sought at the expense of that voluntary response to concern which has so often been a great source or channel of creativity within the Church. "Unification" at such a price would be a hollow achievement indeed.

5. A final factor which we would note concerning the relation of restoration and restructure involves the use of Biblical language as applied to sectarian practice. It seems to me that our movement is doubly guilty in this regard. Not only have we at times been guilty of sectarian practice and attitude, but we have sometimes compounded the offence by applying to such practices the catholic language of the Bible.

Our use of the term "brotherhood" is here a most important case in point. Biblically it appears there is one brotherhood of Christ, consisting of all of Christ's brothers. We have come to identify the term, however, with our movement, or more recently with our structured relationships.

Thus, on one hand, "the Brotherhood" consists of certain agencies and activities identified with the International Convention, and those which are not so identified are not part of "the Brotherhood". Within the context of discussions toward possible merger with other bodies this has sometimes been called a "Disappearing Brotherhood".

On the other hand there have been increasing signs that a "new Brotherhood" is now forming. In contrast to the other it is an "Appearing Brotherhood". But this "brotherhood" likewise consists of agencies and enterprises which are neither as old as the New Testament nor universal. Why is it so hard to understand that a brotherhood does not consist of agencies, but of brothers?

The thing which makes this sectarian use of Biblical language so dangerous is that it throws the weight or prestige of the Bible in support of conceptions and practices which are not Biblical. I think one of the obligations



of the Restoration Movement is to restore to the Church the realization of the one Brotherhood of Christ. Let us either cease the use of the language or live up to it.

#### IV. SOME OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Perhaps we may briefly state some observations and suggestions arising from the foregoing study:

1. It is evident that the principle of cooperation is essential to a more adequate fulfilment of the Church's mission in our time. But the expedients whereby cooperation is enhanced must never be allowed to become tests of fellowship. They are but expressions of the fellowship we confess in Christ. Conceived as such, our institutions may be both unitive and cooperative in the highest sense. Conceived as tests of fellowship our institutions become divisive and destructive of cooperation. To destroy the fellowship of faith in the interest of "cooperation" would be an ultimate irony.

2. We must therefore be alert to the danger inherent in interpreting fellowship in terms of any structure of whatever type.

3. Since it is commonly admitted (as Dean Wilburn) that Church mergers are not the ultimate answer to the problem of Christian unity, we should measure carefully the degree to which we are prepared to sacrifice our identity and witness in order to participate in such mergers.

4. We must reaffirm the personal quality of the fellowship and of the brotherhood. In the final analysis no agency, convention or institution has real existence save as it is composed of people. A structure may make brotherhood in Christ more effective, but it does not make it more real.

5. We must reexamine our significance as a movement within the Church. To what extent are we movement, and to what extent Church? When we have made such a reexamination I am convinced we will not lightly cast aside our movement status.

6. We must distinguish between that Order which is Given and that Organization which is Expedient. Our preoccupation with organization at the expense of order is a serious error.

7. All organizations which are designed to express the unity and enhance the work of the Church must be sufficiently elastic or "open ended" to allow for the out-flow and in-flow of personal fellowship. No individual or group of individuals should be forced outside the fellowship in order to fulfill concerns which arise from the response of faith.



8. We must take care in our discussions that we do not allow ourselves to become "theory brigades", in which we simply seek to justify our vested interests or circles of activity by judicious appeals to truth. It is not our interests which ought to judge truth, but truth which must judge our interests. Indeed, in a very real sense, truth should be our supreme interest.

9. Responses to the concerns of others must not be limited to "reactions" --especially "over-reactions" -- which seldom advance the cause of truth. Surely the issues which confront us merit better treatment than this. It is not reaction, but response -- open-minded, faithful response -- which is needed if we are to continue to be a movement of restoration within the Church.

Reaction is often fearful for, or even fearful of, the truth. Therefore it sometimes seeks to "help the truth" by appeals to sanctions of one sort or another. Such sanctions, whether structural, social, or psychological, may well destroy the "movement" character of the Restoration Movement.

Response is not only faithful to the truth which has been given, but open to that understanding which is promised.

Let us therefore seek that dialogue whereby the fellowship of our faith may become effectual in the knowledge of every good thing which is in us, unto Christ. (Philemon 6)



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